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- To assess the performance of journalism in all its forms, to call attention to its shortcomings and strengths, and to help define — or redefine — standards of honest, responsible service . . . to help stimulate continuing improvement in the profession and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent ●

Excerpt from the *Review's* founding editorial, Autumn 1961

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# CHRONICLE

## Is Brooklyn a dead beat?

The editors of some weekly newspapers in Brooklyn were upset this spring when the head of a task force on racism and the media, appointed by the Brooklyn borough president, threatened to start an advertising boycott of papers that carried too much "racially insensitive" news and not enough "positive news."

The task force chairman was rather vague on what the papers were doing wrong, but an editor who was at the meeting says he made it clear what he meant by positive news: more stories, for instance, about the borough president's development and employment projects. The editor speculated on what

would happen if the Manhattan borough president tried leaning on the press in that way. "There would be an uproar," she said.

The Manhattan borough president, however, is probably not as frustrated as the Brooklyn borough president when it comes to coverage of his projects or, for that matter, his borough. Brooklyn has a population of two and a half million people, roughly equivalent to the population of Houston or Chicago. If it were a city, it would be the nation's fourth largest. Yet since the death of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1955 the borough has had no daily of its own.

Coverage is divided between four major

citywide dailies, including *The New York Times*, and some two dozen community weeklies, which do a decent job of covering everyday neighborhood news but are generally kept from doing aggressive, in-depth reporting by high turnover and low budgets. It is left to the dailies to cover a borough that has some ninety ethnic groups, twenty-three distinct sections — each one of them, like Flatbush and Bedford-Stuyvesant, a small city in itself — and one of the largest black populations in the United States.

But even some of the daily reporters who cover Brooklyn say their papers are not interested in Brooklyn stories. "The media in general are oriented toward Manhattan," says Pat Smith of the *New York Post*. "The media are headquartered there. Their decision-makers are all in Manhattan — they probably go to the same bars. They look on outside of Manhattan as kind of the provinces; they look at the people as second-class citizens."

The size of the bureaus seems to back Smith up. The *Post* and the *Times* cover the borough with just two reporters each, one to cover the courts and one to cover whatever else happens in Brooklyn. The *New York Daily News* has four reporters. *New York Newsday* has the biggest bureau, with seven reporters and an editor.

With the papers devoting such generally meager resources to the borough, Brooklyn-watchers say, important stories are being missed. Controversial plans by the Jehovah's Witnesses, who already own several properties in downtown Brooklyn, to build another large building on the waterfront have not held the dailies' interest for more than a few stories. The borough's traffic problems are not covered adequately and neither is its hospital shortage.


Michael Markowitz, associate editor of *The Phoenix*, a weekly covering several neighborhoods, says the daily press generally has done a poor job of covering new commercial development projects in booming downtown Brooklyn. Each daily has run a half-dozen or so stories on some of the projects, which include a \$1 billion office and research complex known as MetroTech and a \$150 million office tower. But, with the



### Deep in the heart of Brooklyn:

New York Newsday's Brooklyn bureau is located way out in the Sheepshead Bay section of the borough, near Coney Island.

Enjoying the aroma from Nathan's, from left, are: William Douglas, Bob Heisler, Rita Giordano, Wendell Jamieson, Alexis Jetter, James Hairston (the paper's city editor), and Bob Liff.



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exception of *New York Newsday*, the papers have not taken an in-depth look at downtown development and its effects on the community. The plight of small-business owners who will be displaced by the new buildings, for example, has gone largely uncovered, says Beverly Cheuvront, editor of *City Limits*, a monthly magazine on housing and real estate issues.

Tom Morgan, a Brooklyn reporter for the *Times*, notes that the paper did publish a big story on development in the outer boroughs earlier this year. But Morgan says the *Times* "is more concerned with Brooklyn in terms of trends. It doesn't really cover it from the daily breaking-news perspective." Jesus Rangel, a *Times* reporter who used to cover Brooklyn, agrees: "The *Times* doesn't really use a hard-news angle [in Brooklyn]; they like more featurey stories."

With so little coverage of politics, business, education, transportation, and housing,

what do the big dailies cover? The answer seems to be crime. "Unless it's a drug bust in Bed-Stuy, a black-Hispanic conflict in Crown Heights, or a kid killed for a gold chain, you don't hear about it in the dailies," says the Reverend Fred Lucas of the Bridge Street A.M.E. Church. He charges that blacks in the borough receive no substantive coverage. "When you read stories on black Brooklyn," he says, "it's a rape. It's a drug bust. It's a murder."

Jared McCallister, a *Daily News* Brooklyn reporter, says he is acutely aware of the emphasis on crime: "I come in each day hoping and praying there won't be a lot of dead bodies lying around."

The charge of concentrating too heavily on crime is not leveled against *New York Newsday*. Unlike the *News* and *Post* Brooklyn bureaus, which are located at the tip of the borough, close to Borough Hall — and Manhattan — *Newsday*'s bureau is all the

way out at the other end of Brooklyn, in the Sheepshead Bay section. It has individual beats covering safety, the schools, religion, the courts, and community action. Last fall, the paper published a ten-part series on Brooklyn's people, neighborhoods, hospitals, immigrants, waterfront, developers, religion, crime, and politics — forty-three pages in all. It has also done major pieces on the borough's black ministers and on downtown development, including local opposition, delays, and the potential displacement of small businesses.

*Newsday* Brooklyn reporter Bob Liff credits the paper's Manhattan editors with knowing a good thing when they see one. "We get very good play on our stories," he says. Not coincidentally, Brooklyn is also the focus of the paper's current circulation drive.

Tracy Connor

Tracy Connor is an intern at the Review.



CJR/John Willard

#### Dirty tricks?

Reporter Chuck Cook has accused Brad Gates, sheriff of Orange County, California, of spying on him after he wrote stories critical of Gates for *The Orange County Register*. Cook says the alleged surveillance was the work of a "plumbers' unit" that kept track of Gates's enemies.

## The long arm of the law

For awhile in the early 1980s, inmates were dying in the Orange County, California, jail at the rate of almost one a month. There were fifteen deaths in just over a year and a half. In one case, a seventy-eight-year-old Hispanic man picked up on the street and mistaken for drunk died in the jail's drunk tank,

jammed at the time with forty-four rowdy men, more than twice its normal capacity. Calls for help for the man were ignored for almost an hour. His family, frantically searching for him at the jail and a nearby hospital, was not told for three days that he was dead.

His story was part of a series in 1982 in *The Orange County Register* that found the jail severely understaffed and overcrowded, with almost no medical screening. And in five of the fifteen deaths, the paper charged, Brad Gates, the county sheriff and coroner, had either "failed to rule on the cause of death or reported a conclusion not supported by autopsy findings."

The series helped bring about improvements at the jail and won an Investigative Reporters and Editors award. It also shed some light on how Gates, one of the most powerful men in the county, ran things. But that was just the beginning.

A couple of months after the series appeared, Chuck Cook, a reporter who had done extensive work on it, received a call from someone who said he had information on inmates who had been mistreated at the jail. Cook referred the caller to the FBI. "There was something strange I felt about it," Cook says. "I was very careful in what I said to him."

It has come out since in depositions that the caller was an informant working for a kind of "plumbers' unit" in the Orange County sheriff's department, which allegedly spied on people who were critical of Brad Gates. These included Cook, a second *Register* reporter who had looked into Gates's



Howard Lipin/Daily Pilot



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finances, and three men who had run unsuccessfully against Gates for sheriff: a municipal court judge, a private detective, and a college instructor.

The last three filed a civil rights suit against Gates in 1984, alleging that he had orchestrated a campaign of harassment and illegal surveillance against them. The county settled with the judge and the detective for \$375,000. (In the case of the college instructor, Gates and two of his deputies insisted under oath that they had never ordered him to be monitored; it turned out later, however, that some of his classroom lectures had been secretly taped, and the county settled with him, too.)

In the course of the lawsuit, a transcribed account surfaced of the phone conversation between Chuck Cook and his mysterious caller, along with notes made by a member of the plumbers' unit indicating that the caller had been instructed to find out whether Cook had persuaded inmates to lie about jail con-

ditions for the *Register* series.

Cook believes this was an attempt to discredit him, and last year he filed an \$11 million civil rights suit against Gates, Orange County, and the city of Santa Ana, alleging unlawful surveillance, harassment, intimidation, and unlawful criminal investigation. Now an investigative reporter for *The Arizona Republic*, Cook says that while he was at the *Register* his house was watched, he was followed, and he received death threats. "They couldn't refute the credibility of the [series]," he says, "so they tried to destroy the credibility of the reporter."

Eric Dobberteen, Gates's lawyer, says Cook's charges of illegal surveillance are groundless, and that the sheriff was justified in checking out what Dobberteen terms "allegations of possible criminal conduct."

Cook also claims in the suit that Gates and other county officials cost him his job at the *Register*, which he left in 1985, by telling people at the paper that he was under inves-

tigation for criminal activity and for interference with a federal investigation. *Register* editor N. Christian Anderson denies that charge. Cook's resignation, he says, "had to do with his conduct as a reporter." Anderson says Cook was asked to resign after he gave a confidential *Register* outline of the status of a federal investigation, which Cook and another reporter were closely following, to a news source involved in that investigation; according to Anderson, this seriously embarrassed the other reporter. Cook says the outline was not confidential and did not compromise either his fellow reporter or the investigation.

"Had it not been for pressure from the sheriff's department and the district attorney's office," says Cook, "I would never have been terminated." His lawsuit is expected to come to trial early next year.

Kathleen Berry

Kathleen Berry is an intern at the Review.

## Who's killing all these journalists?

It's risky to be a local journalist in many Latin American countries. And, surprisingly, one of the most dangerous is Mexico, which subscribes, at least in theory, to broad freedoms of the press. At least two dozen journalists were murdered during the six-year admin-

istration of outgoing President Miguel de la Madrid, and most of these cases remain unsolved.

Many of the killings may, in fact, have had nothing to do with the victims' professional lives — but Mexican journalists have questioned the government's commitment to investigating them.

"It's hard to say why the cases are not solved — whether it's planned, or due to

ineptitude, or to corruption in the lower levels of law enforcement," says Ignacio E. Lozano, Jr., editor of *La Opinión*, a Spanish-language daily in Los Angeles, and president of the Inter American Press Association.

The most serious charges against law enforcement officials stem from the 1984 murder of Manuel Buendía, a highly respected investigative reporter and columnist, who was shot on the street in Mexico City. The subsequent investigation was botched so badly, critics say, that key evidence mysteriously disappeared or was destroyed, and the case was quietly closed for more than a year before being re-opened last winter.

Buendía had many enemies; in his nationally syndicated column he took on everyone from drug runners to right-wing politicians. A report on Mexico issued this summer by the Committee to Protect Journalists notes that critics of the investigation say "the path leads where the government is not looking" — to officials in a disbanded federal security agency, about whom Buendía is believed to have acquired damaging information.

Last winter there were several murders of journalists in the big drug-moving state of Sinaloa. Jesús Michel Jacobo, a columnist for *El Sol de Sinaloa*, was shot and killed in December. Michel, an attorney, often criticized drug traffickers in his column but also defended them in court. Journalists in the town of Culiacán held a parade urging the police to solve his murder — unsolved still.

In February, Manuel Burgueño Orduño was murdered in Mazatlán. He was a columnist for the daily *Sol del Pacífico* who often wrote about crime and drug trafficking.



**Mourning "El Gato Félix":** Popular columnist Héctor Félix Miranda was murdered in Baja California in April.



John Gibbins/The San Diego Union

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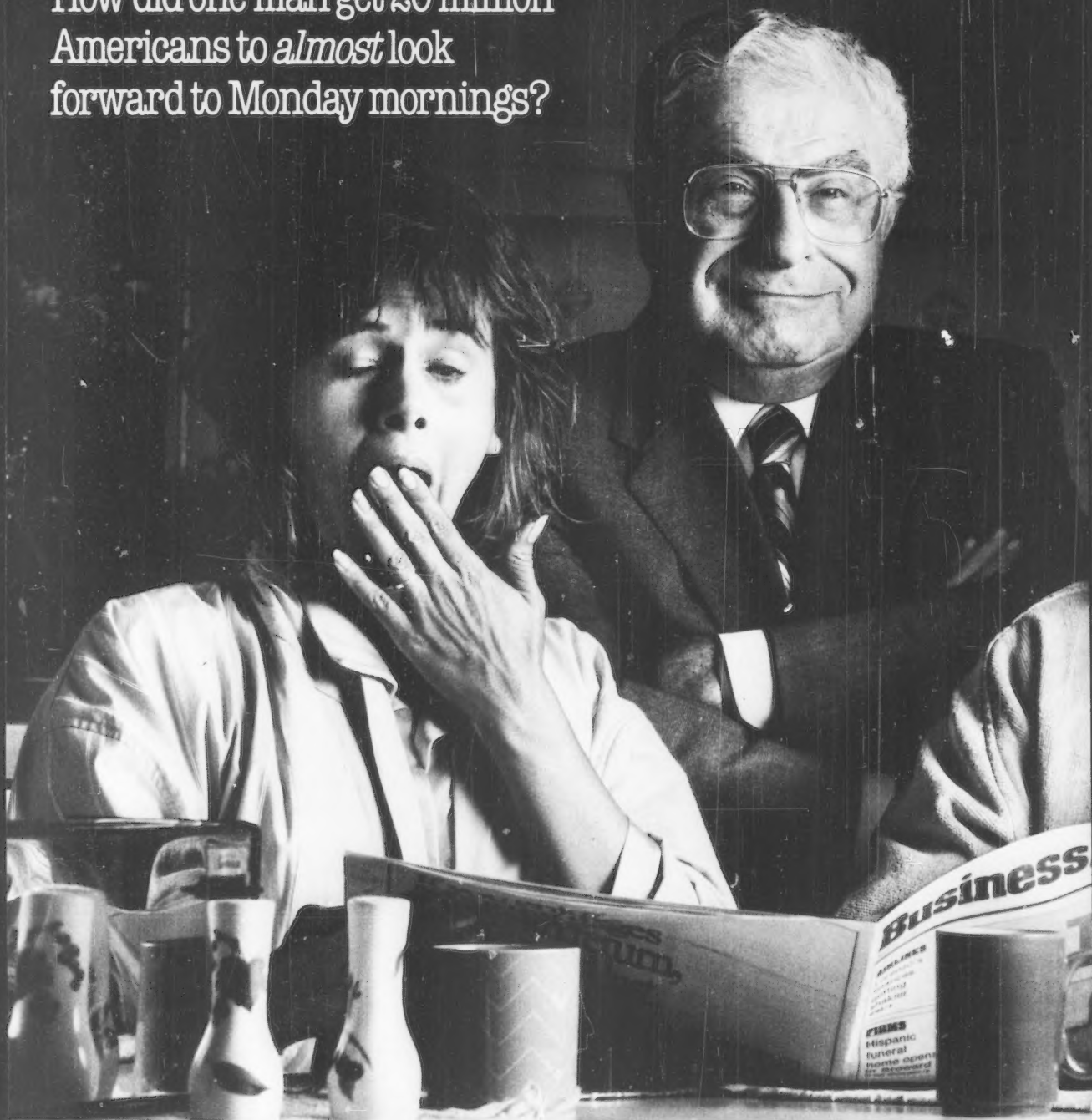
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While he was eating dinner with his family and a friend, two masked men entered his house, moved his family into the living room, and asked the two remaining men to identify themselves. When Burgueño did so, they killed him.

Reporters in Mazatlán protested for three weeks in the plaza outside the mayor's office, holding intermittent hunger strikes and demanding an investigation. When nothing happened, they called a one-hour strike at the city's newspapers to pressure their editors to pressure the police. The case remains unsolved.

The most recent murder occurred in Baja California last April, when Héctor Félix Miranda, a popular columnist for a weekly in Tijuana, was shot in his car on his way to work. This spring and summer, rumors and accusations were flying. The police arrested

a man, but he claims he was tortured into confessing, and many people believe he had little, if anything, to do with the murder.

Jesús Blancornelas, editor and co-founder, with Félix, of the weekly *Zeta*, says he believes the murderer is connected to the president of a local racetrack, whom Félix had criticized and made fun of in his column. The racetrack president's father is a former mayor of Mexico City and one of the most powerful men in the country. Some believe the influence of the father is directly or indirectly protecting the son from investigation. Still others believe the killing was masterminded elsewhere. "El Gato Félix," or Felix the Cat, was a satirist who attacked high- and low-level corruption throughout Mexico. At the time Félix was shot, he was about to link a former Baja California attorney general to drug traffickers.

In June, President de la Madrid was reminded of the murders at the annual Press Freedom Day banquet in Mexico City in an unusually blunt after-dinner speech by Jesús Cantú Escalante, editor of *El Porvenir*, a daily in Monterrey. Cantú noted the power of government over the press: its "paternalistic" control of newsprint supplies, its use of advertising contracts to reward friends (and punish enemies), and its payoffs to reporters. But he saved his sharpest criticism for the handling of the murders.

"The authorities' slow progress in resolving these and other cases," he said, "has made justice an illusion for journalists and for all Mexicans."

Barak Kassar

Barak Kassar, a former intern at the Review, is a student at the University of California at Berkeley.

## A Moon paper's union struggle

When a group of reporters from the Spanish-language daily *Noticias del Mundo* approached The Newspaper Guild in New York last year about organizing the paper, Guild officials were enthusiastic but cautious. *Noticias* is a "Moonie" paper, owned by News World Communications, Inc., the media arm of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church. The reporters were fearful of losing their jobs, and union officials did not think the time was right.

Last fall, however, a popular copy editor was fired after speaking out against a proposed rule requiring staff members to sign in and out. This time things looked more promising. A few reporters met secretly and started working with the Guild; the organizing drive was on. A bitter campaign followed, as the paper fought the effort; some

reporters believed their newsroom phones were tapped. Last January the editorial staff voted 20-15 to be represented by the Guild.

The paper challenged the election result, but it was upheld by the regional office of the National Labor Relations Board. Now the paper is appealing that decision at the federal level. And management has refused to negotiate with the Guild, which has filed an unfair labor practice charge with the NLRB.

*Noticias* is the first News World paper to be organized. It is less well known than the company's two biggest papers in the U.S., the *New York City Tribune* and *The Washington Times*. But influencing the nation's fastest-growing minority is a big priority for the Reverend Moon, who has been described by a former associate as aiming for "absolute dominion" of the U.S. on his way to estab-

lishing a global theocracy. No matter that *Noticias*, started in 1980, has never turned a profit. Publisher Phillip Sanchez says the paper gets contributions from "concerned citizens" and church members. Sanchez told reporters last fall that the paper receives nearly \$200,000 a month in subsidies.

*Noticias* has a circulation of about 25,000. The news pages are an uncontroversial mix of crime stories, immigration issues, wire stories on events in Latin America, social service news affecting Latinos, and coverage of local Latino political, cultural, and sports figures. The editorial pages are virulently right-wing: Jesse Jackson is a "terrorist," Gorbachev is a "KGB stooge," and Castro is a "bloody tyrant." The paper's first editor was recruited from the Argentine military's public relations office.

Publisher Sanchez, a former U.S. ambassador to Honduras and Colombia, is also president of Causa USA, a church-related anticommunist group. Sanchez says his goal is to publish *Noticias* in fifteen American cities with large Hispanic populations, including San Antonio, Dallas, Fresno, and Harlingen, Texas. There is already a Los Angeles edition, which tends to be more sensational than its New York counterpart. When a front-page story last October quoted a seer predicting an earthquake in Los Angeles, radio stations picked it up, and on the appointed day some stores in the Latino section of the city were closed.

In New York, publisher Sanchez and *Noticias* ardently court the Latino community. The paper sponsors parades, contests, and debates. It is much more active than other

**Getting organized:** These *Noticias* employees led the union drive. From left: Manuel Santana, Cristina Mramor, Antero Amparo, Gloria Chavez, Martha Wagh, Julio Py.



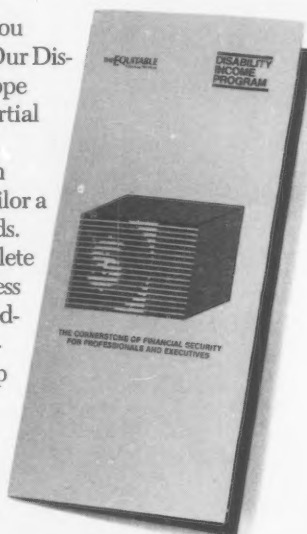
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University of Missouri-  
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CAEMODY  
California State  
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University of Georgia



KAREN LYNN DENNE  
University of  
Southern California



ANH BAO DO  
University of  
Southern California



JAMES ROBERT FOTI  
University of  
Wisconsin-Madison



TUESDAY ARMENTHA  
GEORGES  
Howard University



DORIS JEAN GAGO  
South Dakota  
State University



LORI GRANGE  
University of  
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Point Park College



LAURA ELIZABETH  
HEAD  
University of Maryland



MORGAN THOMAS  
HOLM  
Southern Oregon  
State College



BARRY CHARLES  
JACKSON  
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Spanish-language papers in the public schools, holding workshops on writing and newspaper production for students and providing detailed bilingual curriculum guides for teachers. Governor Cuomo, Mayor Koch, and the Bronx borough president have weekly columns in the paper.

Few reporters at the paper speak English, and most of the newsroom staff — hardly any are members of the Unification Church — feel lucky to be working journalists. “I love writing, I love communicating with people,” says reporter Gloria Chavez. “And, as Hispanics, we don’t have that many options.” Chavez, a Colombian, has four beats: immigration, social services, AIDS, and unemployment. She was a leader in the organ-

izing drive and says a security guard told her he was ordered by management to keep tabs on her comings and goings in the newsroom. She describes a troubled newsroom and an unstable atmosphere, the conditions she believes led to the union’s victory.

Since the vote, there has been some improvement, reporters say: an especially unpopular editor was fired and the newsroom ceiling was repaired. Management says that most employees got a 10 percent raise. In the meantime, however, there has been another rift between management and some members of the news staff. When the paper asked the regional office of the NLRB to decertify the vote, it charged that some employees had been intimidated by pro-union

co-workers. The complaint was thrown out for lack of evidence in March.

This spring, the paper appealed that decision on the federal level, and this time it added an affidavit accusing Juan Salazar — a copy editor who had died in early February — of having lent money to another reporter to influence that reporter to vote for the union. Friends in the newsroom say that Salazar was in the habit of lending money to co-workers and that he did try to persuade others to vote for the union. But they do not believe he tried to pressure anyone.

Leah Halper

*Leah Halper is a New York-based free-lance writer who specializes in labor issues.*

## Taiwan’s press breaks loose

“I’ve always felt this day would come,” says Cheng She-wu, the founder of the World College of Journalism in Taipei. After waiting almost forty years for the Taiwanese government to allow him to publish a newspaper, Cheng planned to celebrate his ninety-second birthday this summer with the first issue of his own tabloid.

On January 1, the government opened the door to new publishing licenses and subsequently approved fifty-seven new newspapers. As of late June, twenty-three were already on the stands. It also permitted papers to exceed their previous twelve-page limit, and immediately they doubled in size.

These reforms are in line with a liberalization process set in motion last year when martial law was lifted and opposition parties were legalized in response to a growing dissident movement. As Taiwan has prospered in recent years its people have demanded a greater voice in government, forcing President Chiang Ching-kuo to introduce a number of reforms prior to his death in January. Now the country has entered a heady period of *glasnost*, marked by such major changes as allowing visits to mainland China and the end of a “strongman” presidency. The competition sparked by the publishing licenses has produced more daring journalism.

Reporters on the country’s mainstream dailies who wrote secretly for the opposition press can now criticize the government in bylined stories in their own papers, and can go directly to official sources, who now feel more comfortable about granting interviews. Coverage of antigovernment demonstrations has become routine, and readers accustomed to a virtual blackout on news from mainland China now receive detailed reports on its affairs. More space has also meant the intro-

duction of letters-to-the-editor sections and more in-depth pieces.

Much of the current investigative work has centered on debunking the ruling Kuomintang party’s version of the past. “All the history has to be made clear before we can go forward,” says Antonio Chiang, publisher of *The Journalist*, a weekly news magazine. “It’s a political necessity to collapse the old house of cards.”

One of the most sensitive stories, broken by a reporter at the *Independence Morning Post*, has to do with the case of General Sun Li-jen, who was placed under house arrest in 1955 for alleged involvement in a military coup against former president Chiang Kai-shek. The paper reported that General Sun had actually been cleared shortly after his arrest, but that at the time the Kuomintang failed to act on the finding. This spring, Taiwan’s defense minister paid a visit to the eighty-nine-year-old general to inform him of his release. (Sun requested that his guards stay on, as he had developed a “deep affinity” for them in the last three decades.)

On other historical issues, reporters have taken their lead from opposition legislators in the Democratic Progressive party. Some papers gave a lot of space to the party’s call for an inquiry into a 1947 massacre of thousands of native Taiwanese by Kuomintang troops, an event not mentioned in local history books. At a presidential press conference in February, the first in thirteen years, President Lee Teng-hui questioned the need for an inquiry and was criticized in print for it — another taboo broken.

There is no question, however, about two remaining taboos: advocating independence (the government considers Taiwan a province of mainland China, and the Kuomintang

hopes to return there victoriously some day) and advocating communism. Reporters can quote someone advocating the right to express an opinion on independence, but that’s as far as they can go. A law forbidding publication of anything that “commits or instigates others to commit sedition or treason” remains in full force, and the government used it to temporarily suspend the licenses of eight magazines between January and June. One opposition publisher has had licenses suspended thirty times.

The upheaval in the newspaper industry has had little effect on television and radio news. The airwaves are dominated by the Broadcasting Corporation of China, whose major shareholder is the Kuomintang. On TV, news of the mainland is generally limited to catastrophes, like destructive hailstorms and earthquakes. And when covering local demonstrations, says Cheng Su-ming, deputy director of the news department at the Chinese Television System, “we hesitate to show very brutal confrontation scenes. We don’t want to give an impression that the people and the government are at odds.”

Overcoming decades of self-censorship has not been easy for some. “We feel a little bit lost on how far we should go — if we have a sense of responsibility for the whole society,” says Alice Kao, deputy managing editor of *United Daily News*, the paper considered closest to the government.

But that view is not shared by many other Taiwanese journalists, who are enjoying their new freedoms and speeding the momentum of change.

Margot Cohen

*Margot Cohen, formerly a staff reporter for The American Lawyer magazine, is a free-lance writer based in Manila.*

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# CAPITAL LETTER

by WILLIAM BOOT

## Captain Al explores planet Earth

*A cloudless evening sky. Camera pans past a sliver of moon to linger on the constellation Orion. Music: mysterious yet soothing.*

NARRATOR: USA Today — the final frontier of newspaper journalism! (Cut to aerial view of sleek craft bearing USA Today emblem.) These are the voyagers of "JetCapade," fourteen ace reporters, under command of USA Today chairman Allen Neuharth, exploring the far reaches of the globe. Their seven-month mission: to seek out exotic peoples and colorful heads of state; to spot trends on six continents; to boldly go where scarcely anyone at "McPaper" has gone before — beyond three paragraphs on an international news topic.

(Dissolve to morning street scene near imposing iron tower. Neuharth, in sidewalk cafe, is joined by JetCapade scouting party returning from patrol.)

NEUHARTH: Analysis?

SENIOR REPORTER: Interesting, Captain. Our soundings show that the natives are definitely humanoid, with a penchant for wine, women, song, and sex. As a matter of fact, sir, love is in the air everywhere. Fashion is big here. Chefs cook with delicate sauces. This place is known as France.

NEUHARTH: We must file an immediate report! (Activates porta-phone.) Beam us up, Scotty.

There really is a JetCapade. Its stated mission really was bold (for a paper usually riveted by the likes of Madonna and Pee-wee Herman): "To help the USA better understand its friends — and adversaries — around the world." And in a July 1 dispatch from Paris, Neuharth truly wrote the following: "Food and fashion are big. . . . But back to the basics of the good life here — wine, women, song, sex. In daytime, dusk, and darkness, love is in the air everywhere." (See also — same date — the blockbusting FRANCE AT A GLANCE box — "Languages: French . . . Capital/Largest City: Paris.")

So it went from February through the summer in some thirty countries visited by the "Jetcateers" (as Neuharth was wont to call them). Their dispatches were infused with a spirit of wide-eyed discovery, as if Mexico were Mars, Japan Jupiter. JetCapade marveled, for instance, that in Switzerland (TINY COUNTRY — BIG BANKS, June 24) the inhabitants make precision watches, rich chocolates, and a special kind of cheese; that Saudi Arabia ("a family-run country — literally," April 1) had acquired vast wealth due to the discovery of (can you guess?) . . . oil!; that in Egypt (old meets new!) the "pennants of the past" (Pyramids, Sphinx, etc.) now actually coexist with such modern conveniences as the Cairo sewer system (April 8).

Does USA Today know something the rest of us don't about the mental con-

dition of the typical American news consumer, aka Joe Sixpack? Can Joe have met with an accident and suffered irreversible brain damage? USA Today seems to assume the worst. Drawing inferences from the contents of JetCapade, one can posit the paper's "post-accident" reader profile: Mr. Sixpack still recognizes American products and celebrities, and he has retained a vague sense of national superiority, triggered by repetition of the initials "USA." But when it comes to the outside world, his mind is a virtual blank slate — marked only with a few fragmentary television impressions, clichés, and stereotypes. Joe has absolutely no knowledge of world geography. His deep underlying fear of the unknown is triggered by references to "Brussels" and "Toronto," which can drive him straight to the six-pack unless carefully handled.

JetCapade has been acutely sensitive to those latent fears. Its strategy for keeping things mellow will no doubt become a model for "feel-good" foreign correspondence in the years ahead. The approach is simple: make the reader feel close to home even if the dateline is 8,000 miles away. Latch onto anybody or anything that is reassuringly familiar. There are three key categories to watch for:

● Celebrities. Celebrities are a godsend. If you're in Paris, quote an actress like Leslie Caron ("I'm surprised that I still receive a lot of fan mail from the

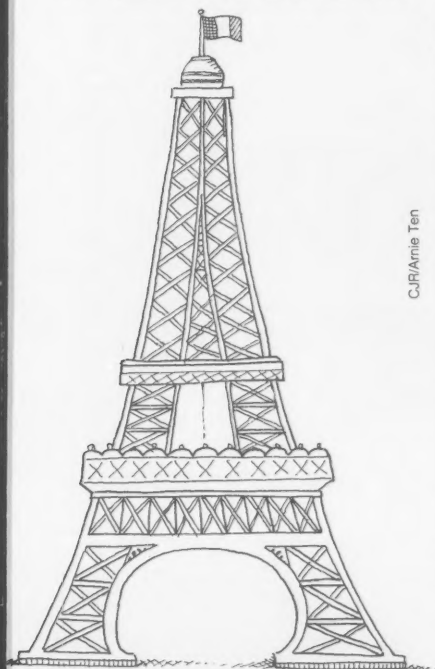




U.S.'). If Sylvester Stallone happens to be in Sweden plugging his latest Rambo classic, quote him as an authority on the blonde, blue-eyed Nordic women ("They're everywhere"). If no celebrity can be tapped, go to surrogates such as Egyptian hotel manager Hesham Kattan: "Many famous people stay here. Omar Sharif was here recently."

● Living clichés, the sort of national archetypes who will stir a pleasing glimmer of recognition in even the dimmest reader. In Brazil, track down the blonde beauty who inspired the "girl from Ipanema" song in the sixties. JetCapade quoted her prominently and ran her picture twice — on the front page and on the inside. In Argentina, highlight the opinions of gauchos and tango dancers, in Mexico seek out piñata makers and Acapulco cliff divers. Quote their comments, no matter how vapid or absurd ("One has to have diver's blood to know within oneself that one is a diver," February 19).

● The "USA" label. When foreign lands are shown to bear the imprint of the United States, they are perforce less intimidating to Joe Sixpack. So when reporting from Tokyo, for instance, highlight facts such as the following: "McDonald's has 604 restaurants in Ja-



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pan — more than in any country outside the USA" (May 27). Take the edge off stiff, haughty foreign leaders by emulating Neuharth's approach to François Mitterrand. Neuharth stressed that the president's helicopter was a Super-Puma, "same as Donald Trump flies around New York," and asserted that Mitterrand "looks a little like a mini-MacArthur" (July 1).

One other point: the odd patriotic boast can never hurt, as JetCapade showed in its June 24 dispatch from Bern. Acknowledging that Switzerland was a giant in the world of chocolate, the report then declared: "But the USA is the world's No. 1 chocolate producer. In 1987, Switzerland produced 89,052 tons of chocolate, but the U.S. produced 1,100,000 tons." Chocolate chauvinism! — another journalistic milestone.

Speaking of chocolate, *USA Today's* editors appear to be convinced that, in his present condition, Mr. Sixpack can digest very little except "mind candy," journalistic confections. JetCapade duly stressed the sweet side of life and underplayed the bitter — if possible to an

even greater extent than the rest of the paper. Take JetCapade's treatment of Egypt. Many experts on the Middle East fear it will explode some day in an Islamic fundamentalist revolt, fermented in staggering urban and rural poverty. One got little inkling of that threat from JetCapade, whose tone was upbeat ("PYRAMIDS, PRIDE, PROGRESS. . . Egypt is . . . up-to-date," April 8). JetCapade's report noted that "overpopulation means much housing here is substandard like some in New York or Detroit," but buried this understatement in a sea of froth. Specialists on the Arab world also see Saudi Arabia as a potential powder keg, as a result in part of stresses placed on the culture by oil wealth. But Neuharth says the country is enjoying "a rags-to-riches golden era . . . [a] true-to-life fairy tale." With no irony intended, an interview with members of the Saudi royal family was bannered WE SPEND A LOT OF MONEY — BUT WISELY.

As this last headline suggests, foreign leaders have gotten sweet treatment from JetCapade — they were simply given a

forum to say what they wanted: USA: YOU ARE THE PILLAR OF OUR POLICY (Japan's Takeshita); MIDEAST PEACE-MAKING IS MY NICHE (Egypt's Mubarak), 'WE'RE NOT A LITTLE DICTATORSHIP IN THE BUSH' (South Africa's Botha), etc. Had there been a "ShipCapade" fifty years ago, one might have read, dateline Berlin, WE NEED MORE LIVING SPACE, LIKE USA PIONEERS — TEA 'N' TABLE TALK WITH TOP TEUTON. The Jetcateers did not challenge world leaders with tough questioning. Indeed, Neuharth told the National Press Club in June that nonconfrontation was JetCapade's policy, one that should be emulated by U.S. journalists in order to shed an "Ugly American" tag: "We really ought to concentrate on informing rather than indicting."

**T**here has been, in fact, pathetically little newsworthy information in the interviews. For instance, Neuharth's account of his talk with Mitterrand (CONVERSATION ALOFT WITH THE PRESIDENT, July 1) ran thirty-one paragraphs, but only three were de-

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voted to what Mitterrand actually said (platitudes on topics such as summitry, arms control, and trade). The piece opened with a tally of how many interviews JetCapade had bagged with heads of state (twenty so far, compared with fifty state governors in the 1987 Bus-Cade) and meandered on about the presidential helicopter and its staff ("In the rear compartment, six assistants, a toilet, mini-refreshment bar . . ."); Neuharth's own army experience, admittedly a subject of fascination; and a D-Day remembrance ceremony.

James Deakin, writing on the foibles of the American press, has stressed the importance of "connexity" in human events: "When . . . it is realized that issues are interwoven . . . that a thing in the present was caused by other things in the past and will cause other things in the future — then explanation begins. Understanding begins. *Comprehension* begins." Deakin complained, in his book *Straight Stuff*, that most journalists give short shrift to historical, cause-and-effect explanations because they are preoccupied with "now."

With *USA Today* the enunciation is "NOW!" The paper seems to assume that Joe Sixpack has no short-term memory and only the vaguest understanding of cause and effect. So JetCapade has naturally kept the tone trendy — facts, figures, photos, random quotation, all neatly packaged with virtually no historical background, no "connexity" included. Regarding the strict Islamic laws enforced in Saudi Arabia, JetCapade declared: "Virtue is in. Vice is out." This made a moral code that has been imposed for hundreds of years sound like the "new celibacy" fad among U.S. yuppies.

And so it went. Since the past didn't matter, the Jetcateers had a license to descend on a country, poke around for a week, then toss off impressions almost at whim: "Most Brazilians seem unworried about the future" (Did the reporters talk to poor peasants or shantytown dwellers, who live miserably? None were quoted); the French are displaying a "new self-esteem" (New since when?); due to South African reforms, there is "no 'back of the bus'

syndrome as there was in the South of the USA 30 years ago" and coloreds seem "generally content to have a foot in the door, including their own [house] of parliament, albeit with little power" (How many "coloreds" did JetCapade talk to? Did it tap their true feelings? Has social segregation really disappeared in all parts of South Africa?). The least treacle-coated and hence least nauseating dispatches were from Vietnam and Cuba. These reports showed a bit more of the bitter side of everyday life — perhaps because the paper decided that readers' preconceptions of Marxism put Pollyanna off limits.

The simple lesson to emerge from JetCapade may be this: if you assume your reader is a quasi-vegetable, you cannot "help the USA understand its friends — and adversaries — around the world." To accomplish that goal, you would have to stop pandering and raise Joe's presumed IQ at least to 90. Mr. Sixpack may be a bit slow and provincial, but he is unduly degraded when a newspaper's unofficial motto becomes "A Mind Is a Terrible Thing."

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# COMMENT

## Brazil, the bankers, and the U.S. press

Brazil? Who cares about it? American bankers do. Brazil is the developing world's largest debtor, with \$121 billion in outstanding loans — about two-thirds of which is held by private banks, with the U.S. being the largest single creditor nation. In February 1987 Brazil declared a moratorium on its debt payments to commercial banks; the country's five largest creditors reportedly lost \$1.25 billion during the moratorium, which ended this past June when Brazil reached an agreement with the International Monetary Fund. This cleared the way for loans to be rescheduled and regular payments resumed. Bankers — especially American bankers — heaved a collective sigh of relief.

This sigh was echoed by American reporters, whose coverage of the moratorium revealed a profound concern for the plight of the bankers and a corresponding lack of interest in the plight of the Brazilians themselves.

This bias was clearly seen in the sources used by reporters. An examination of moratorium coverage in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Miami Herald* shows that journalists consistently turned to American debt experts, bankers, and businessmen — and, in the latter two categories, their counterparts in Brazil — in explaining the moratorium to the American public. Moreover, while critics of the moratorium were frequently quoted, supporters were virtually shunned, as were those who criticized it as inadequate. (There is a substantial faction in Brazil that favors outright default on at least a part of the debt.)

As a result, the Brazilian perspective on the moratorium was rarely aired. It is, admittedly, a *foreign* perspective but hardly an irrational one. Indeed, many heavily indebted American farmers would probably find it readily comprehensible inasmuch as the bulk of Brazil's massive debt was contracted between 1964 and 1985, during most of which time bankers were practically pushing money on would-be borrowers. And, as supporters of the moratorium pointed out, the regime that took out the loans was an unelected military dictatorship. The nation's debt during this period rose from \$2.5 billion to \$105 billion. By 1980, Brazil's total foreign debt payments represented 259 percent of total export earnings — 200 percent was considered the "danger" mark by Morgan Guaranty — yet was still considered a "five-star" borrower, and thus able to continue receiving loans upon request. Contracts for these loans, furthermore, contained floating interest rates, which meant that bank profits were fully protected.

There are plenty of Brazilians who are able to provide this type of information. One of the most influential figures in all Brazil is Paulo Evaristo Arns, the archbishop of São Paulo and an eloquent and knowledgeable spokesman on the issue of foreign debt. In 1985 a Swiss magazine quoted Arns explaining why it was impossible for Brazil to continue making payments on the debt: "We have already taken everything the people had to eat, even though two-thirds of them are already going hungry. When we borrowed, interest rates were 4 percent, they're 8 percent now, and at one point they went as high as 21 percent . . . The people are now expected to pay off [the debt] in low salaries and hunger, but we have already reimbursed the debt once or twice over, considering the interest paid."

Apparently, no American reporter considered Arns to be a useful source: his name did not appear in a single article on the moratorium. In fact, I found comments from only five Brazilians outside the government — a total of six citations — who were strong proponents of the moratorium or of more radical solutions to the debt crisis.

**H**ow did reliance on this rather narrow spectrum of sources affect coverage? First, reporters described key Brazilian government officials, and their policies, in almost precisely the same way that bankers did. Finance Minister Dilon Funaro, the architect of the moratorium, is a São-Paulo-based businessman who, in Brazil, is regarded as a centrist. American bankers, on the other hand, tend to regard him as a rabid nationalist and a dogmatic leftist, and it was this view that prevailed in the U.S. press.

Alan Riding, writing in *The New York Times* of March 2, 1987, shortly after the moratorium had been declared, stated that "foreign bankers and officials have discovered to their annoyance that Mr. Funaro negotiates not as a pragmatist looking for a deal, but as a moralist defending a principle." The principle Riding referred to was Brazil's unwillingness to sign agreements with the International Monetary Fund, which, Funaro was quoted as saying, "allow Fund economists to come here and determine our economic policies." John Barham, in the April 10 *Wall Street Journal*, wrote that Funaro had "taken a hard line on Brazil's debt" and had sought to "politicize the international debt problem."

Press criticism of Funaro continued — as did criticism from the international banking community — until Funaro resigned in late April. Bradley Graham, in the May 1 *Wash-*



**'Little attention was given  
to how the burden of debt would affect  
the 60 percent of Brazil's  
population that lives in poverty'**

*ington Post*, wrote that Funaro's resignation was "raising hopes that [Brazil] will be able to ease strained relations with foreign bankers and build a political consensus . . . for austere economic measures." Whose hopes were being discussed here? I spent a year in Brazil, leaving shortly before Funaro's resignation. There was no groundswell of public support calling for improved relations with the banks, and I cannot recall having witnessed or heard of a single rally demanding "austere economic measures" so that debt payments could be resumed.

**T**he finance minister who engineered the return to the International Monetary Fund was Mailson Ferreira da Nóbrega, who had been appointed to that post in December 1987. Nóbrega made ending the debt moratorium his top priority and, as a result, has been popular with the bankers — and with North American reporters. On January 10, *The Washington Post* ran a profile of Nóbrega by Mac Margolis. Margolis called him "a technician with no binding party loyalties" and claimed that Nóbrega had "already . . . won widespread praise" for his efforts to resolve the debt crisis. He also pointed out that Nóbrega "was expected to drop the ideological stance that has prevailed in prior debt negotiations."

After the IMF deal was formalized, Alan Riding, in the June 1 *Times*, described Nóbrega as "an apolitical technocrat," whose appointment reflected the Brazilian government's recognition of "the need for change." A June 16 *Christian Science Monitor* article was equally respectful; according to reporter Julia Michaels, "For the first time in ages, businessmen in Brazil say they see economic improvement on the horizon." One reason for this optimism, Michaels wrote, was that "planning and finance ministers are making all the right moves to straighten out the country's debt situation."

The fact that reporters often describe Nóbrega as being apolitical is interesting. Nóbrega, who served as vice-minister of finance during the last years of the military dictatorship, has carried out a distinctly conservative economic plan — one that will be particularly onerous for poor and middle-class Brazilians — in an attempt to satisfy the bankers. It would appear that what makes Nóbrega "apolitical" and Funaro "political" is simply that the former is acceptable to the bankers while the latter is not.

It is also of interest that not one of the newspapers surveyed ran any articles discussing the general public's views on the government's suspension of interest payments. Little

attention was given to what might be considered an important aspect of the story — how the burden of debt would affect the roughly 60 percent of the country's population that lives in poverty — and even less to the potentially explosive political dimensions of the debt problem. Addressing a 1985 conference on the Latin American debt, Luís Inácio da Silva, a prominent Brazilian political and labor leader, said it would be no exaggeration to say that "the Third World War has already started," a war that "is tearing down Brazil, Latin America, and practically all the third world. Instead of soldiers dying, there are children. Instead of millions of wounded, there are millions of unemployed. Instead of destruction of bridges, there is tearing down of factories, schools, hospitals, and entire economies . . . It is a war by the United States against the Latin American continent and the third world. It is a war over the foreign debt, one which has as its main weapon interest, a weapon more deadly than the atom bomb."

Brazil's accord with the IMF may alleviate but will not solve that country's debt problems. Within the next few years, Brazil — or another major Latin American debtor, such as Argentina or Mexico — will be back in the headlines as yet another debt problem becomes critical. American reporters would serve their readers best by expanding their contacts and, perhaps, by reminding themselves before they sit down to write their reports that it is not American bankers who suffer most from the debt crisis but the poor of Latin America.

KEN SILVERSTEIN

*Ken Silverstein, who spent a year in Brazil, is a free-lance writer who lives in New York City.*

## **Darts and laurels**

**Dart:** to the *New York Daily News*, for a petty put-down of a worthy competitor. In a June 12 Sunday magazine piece on the creative wizardry behind the spectacular signs that light up Times Square, assistant editor John Sullivan concluded his brief history of the news bulletins that travel around the old New York Times building thusly: "The headline zipper is operated today by a small Long Island newspaper." The paper, of course, is *Newsday*, whose New York edition has Sullivan's *News* looking nervously over its shoulder.

**Dart:** to *Newsday*, for applying a sexist double standard to news about women and men. Reporting in the May 11

edition on the appointment of Jane Amsterdam as editor of the *New York Post*, staff writer David Firestone added to appropriate facts about her journalistic background and experience such gratuitous irrelevancies as her allegedly ruthless ambition whatever the human cost, her alleged attraction to the swanky social scene, and her alleged flattery of male colleagues on her way to the top. As noted by outgoing *Post* editor Frank Devine in a May 16 attack on the "crotch-scratching, thigh-slapping, foot-stomping display of macho yokelism" in Firestone's piece, *Newsday's* earlier handling of the appointment of Max Frankel as executive editor of *The New York Times* offered a telling study in contrasts. "All we learn," Devine scathingly observed, "is that Frankel was fifty-six at the time and that over a thirty-four-year *Times* career he served as foreign, diplomatic, and White House correspondent, head of the *Times* Washington bureau and Sunday editor. The only comment *Newsday* offered came from the mouth of *Times* publisher Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, who said of Frankel that 'he is a superb reporter and editor who has gained the full confidence of his colleagues and myself.'"

**Laurel:** to *The Boston Globe* and staff reporter Peter G. Gosselin, for a four-part exposé (beginning April 3) of the shady doings at First Boston Charter Corporation, a front for a worldwide network of elusive operators who over the years have pocketed tens of millions of dollars in fees from legitimate businesses for helping them arrange loans that never came through. By April 13 Gosselin was able to report that, as a result of his series, First Boston Charter had been abruptly evicted by county sheriffs from its downtown Boston office; that an executive whose activities were described in the stories had surrendered to Las Vegas authorities to face a twenty-six-count indictment; and that the FBI had announced its intention to vigorously pursue the series' new leads. (Similar fraudulent ventures have kept going strong, Gosselin observed, not least because of the legitimacy conferred by lucrative ads in respectable news outlets, including *The Wall Street Journal* and the *Globe* itself. "At a time last year when *The Boston Globe* was running news stories about investment frauds involving rare coins," he wrote, "it was also publishing full-page ads (at \$20,000 a page) from a coin company cited by the U.S. Postal Service for deceptive advertising.")

**Dart:** to Tom McEwen, sports editor of the *Tampa Tribune*, for putting a foul-smelling foot in a source's mouth. Reporting in an April 21 "Morning After" column on the happy announcement by University of South Florida basketball coach Bobby Paschal that he had successfully recruited a six-foot, ten-inch player from Haifa, Israel, McEwen tacked on this unwinning joke: "Might serve as the team treasurer, too, Paschal said." Trouble is, as Linda Gibson reported in the May 11 edition of the *Tampa Bay Weekly*, the anti-Semitic kicker attributed to Paschal was created by McEwen himself. (On May 15, McEwen apologized in print.)

**Dart:** to the National Press Club, for appointing public relations representatives to act as judges for the organiza-

tion's annual consumer reporting awards. Screening the entries for this year's \$1,000 prizes in the category of reporting by small and large newspapers, for instance, was a panel of judges — handpicked by committee chairman Tim Burr and curiously unchallenged by NPC president Lee Roderick, who appointed Burr and to whom Burr reports — that included p.r. people from such government agencies as the FDA and the FTC; panels judging other categories included representatives of such business-oriented outfits as the Direct Marketing Association and the Council of Better Business Bureaus. Led by several of its more professionally minded members, who only recently became aware of the degree to which judges are drawn from the p.r. world, the NPC board at its July 11 meeting unanimously agreed to consider proposals for reform.

**Laurel:** to KIRO-TV, Seattle, and consumer reporter Herb Weisbaum, for a high-powered inquiry into claims made by the National FuelSaver corporation that its well-advertised device, the GaSaver, can improve the gas mileage of automobiles by some 22 percent. Based on six months of research that included interviews with experts and salesmen, as well as independent, station-sponsored lab and road tests at two universities, Weisbaum's four-part series concluded that devices like the GaSaver won't help fuel economy in the slightest and may even cause damage to the engine of the car.

**Dart:** to Dennis Shere, former publisher of the *Dayton Daily News* (a link in the Cox Newspapers chain), for basing professional publishing decisions on personal born-again beliefs. Citing "publisher's discretion," Shere in mid-May rejected a three-line classified ad from Dayton's Gay and Lesbian Center announcing a health lecture series on AIDS. In the wake of ensuing protests by outraged gays, Cox president David Easterly gave Shere a chance to adjust his position or resign; Shere refused to "compromise" his "Christian convictions" and eventually was fired. "I believe in most cases inappropriate behavior has led to exposure to the [AIDS] virus and its inevitably deadly consequences," Shere subsequently explained to readers in a statement that ran in the June 9 *Daily News*. "The homosexual groups must deal with that, and placing ads in the newspaper is not the answer. As for the individuals involved, I pray they can find, through the love of Jesus Christ, a way to end a conduct that is tantamount to moral suicide." (Easterly's laudable decision to keep the paper's columns open to gays was not without its cost: by the next day, according to a front-page story in the *Daily News*, some 425 readers had cancelled their subscriptions.)

**Laurel:** to WTSP-TV, St. Petersburg, and health reporter Michael Salort, for risky treatment of a sensitive subject: the failure of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and its Florida counterpart to protect the workers in the state, largely because of cutbacks in funds for what George Bush was shown on camera describing as "needless regulation." Among the examples in Salort's twelve-minute report: workers exposed to coal fumes and asbestos in the coal-burning power plants of the Tampa Electric Company,



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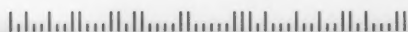
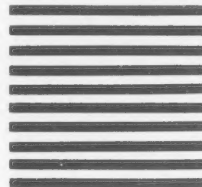
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one of WTSP's major advertisers. Noting that at least one TECO employee had been fired after filing a complaint, and that the safety agency had borrowed TECO's own language in formulating its official, dismissive response, the report brought denials and complaints from Tampa Electric — along with phone calls and letters from TECO workers saying that they too had been hurt on the job.

**Dart:** to *Dollars & Sense*, an upscale black bimonthly magazine, and publisher Donald C. Walker, for focusing on the dollars and forgetting about the sense. When the Center for Science in the Public Interest brought out a sobering report on the special advertising campaigns, promotional events, and goodwill contributions designed by the alcoholic beverage industry to push the use of its products by blacks — sobering because, while blacks consume less alcohol per capita than whites, drinking in the black community results in disproportionately high rates of such alcohol-related problems as cirrhosis, cancer, and violent crime — publisher Walker responded with an intemperate editorial on the evils of the report. The CSPI report — which was initiated at the suggestion of the director of the Institute on Black Chemical Abuse, prepared with the assistance of black alcoholism counselors around the country, and endorsed by, among others, Representative John Conyers, Jr., a founding member of the congressional black caucus, and former congresswoman Barbara Jordan, who wrote the pref-

ace — stressed that an unhealthy dependence on the industry's advertising dollars leaves black-owned media unwilling to report on the problems, prevention, and treatment of alcohol abuse. As if to underscore that point, publisher Walker announced this spring that the magazine's upcoming "Beverage, Food, and Tobacco Industries issue" would feature an in-depth cover story on "the positive business and charitable relationships between the black community and alcohol and tobacco marketers. . . ."

**Dart:** to the Bremerton, Washington, *Sun*, for the curious news judgment that put at the top of its April 18 front page a nine-by-six-inch photo documenting the kickoff of a Kiwanis project to develop a local park; squeezed into a lower-left-hand pocket of the same front page was a three-by-three-inch picture of the dramatic destruction of an Iranian oil platform by the U.S. Navy in the Persian Gulf. One possible explanation for giving the park project such generous play: Jerry Dyer, whose face appears in the group of volunteers, is both a member of Kiwanis and managing editor of the *Sun*.

**Dart:** to *Philadelphia* magazine, for "Why Is There Radio?" — an unlovely little item that answered the question by comparing classic mug shots of eight male and female newscasters in local radio and TV. "The camera never lies," the text cruelly observed. "Look at these pix of our radio and TV stars and figure it out."

**Dart:** to the *Detroit Free Press*, for an eloquent reminder that valor is not the better part of discretion. Rather than risk offending Attorney General Edwin Meese during the critical period in which he was making up his mind about whether or not to approve the controversial application for a joint operating agreement between Gannett's *Detroit News* and Knight-Ridder's *Free Press*, the (normally liberal) *Free Press* chose to soften its editorial commentary on the growing controversy over Meese himself. As reported by Eleanor Randolph in the July 19 *Washington Post*, ever since December, when an administrative law judge appointed by

Meese recommended against the JOA, the paper has been watering down its words and blotting out all anti-Meese cartoons. *Free Press* cartoonist Bill Day, two of whose syndicated cartoons (shown here) went unpublished in his own paper, says he was told, "Don't even show me an idea." Fortunately, such self-serving tact was not reflected in most other papers in the Knight-Ridder chain, Randolph's study showed — with the conspicuous exception of its flagship paper, *The Miami Herald*, which also banned all cartoons about Meese. (On August 8, Meese ruled in favor of the Detroit JOA.) ■



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# Party time in Atlanta

The Democratic script called for a love feast.  
The press ate it up

by PHILIP WEISS

I flew into Atlanta the Saturday night before the Democratic convention and made it to the tail end of a vast media party whose lavishness was confusing. There was room after room of ribs and fried chicken and Brunswick stew and homemade ice cream and peach strudel and silver chalices with fountain-like spigots that sprayed champagne and peach schnapps into a moat. The bars were all free, paid for by the Democratic National Committee. The party took place in the Georgia World Congress Center, across from the Omni Coliseum, the site of the convention, and the high point of the night came when Stephen Stills played "For What It's Worth." This is a song from the sixties concerning social upheaval. The best verse goes in part:

What a field day for the heat [the police]

A thousand people in the street

Singing songs, and they're carrying signs. . .

It was 12:30, the party was supposed to be over, but a couple of thousand people jammed the stage and chanted the refrain and danced. For the press this may have been the most passionate moment of the week, but it was a nostalgic passion: no one was in the street, it was too hot there. And, over the years, the worldview had given way to one far more complex and technocratic — one that could contain ribs and strudel and peach schnapps and in turn be contained by the chilled air of the Democratic National Committee and the Dukakis organization. We were about to be herded from one air-conditioned story to another, and the fact that there were silver chalices instead of troughs made it that much more subtle and, yes, fun.

There were to be only two big stories that week. One was the Jackson-Dukakis rapprochement; the other was the one that snuck up on the press at the end — the use the Democrats were making of the media, especially television, to deliver a newsless, happy message. This wasn't a story engendered by anyone who was covering the convention but by an executive — Roone Arledge of ABC — who was evidently disturbed by the expense of airing staged floor

*Philip Weiss is a contributing editor of the Review.*

demonstrations. He had fastened on to an idea that the hordes of journalists — as many as 15,000 gathered in good cheer to promote the theme of the unified Democrats — had no real interest in acknowledging.

Smoked ham, shrimp soufflé, biscuits, corn bread — *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, having lobbied for the convention to come to Atlanta, had spared no expense on its big party at the High Museum of Art on Sunday night, "A Special Edition of Southern Hospitality." I wound my way past bars and buffet tables to get deeper into the museum, coming at last to the dessert station, where there was peach ice cream, peach sherbet, peach tarts, peach cheesecake, etc.

Just about then Jesse Jackson came into a white tent that had been put up to connect two museum buildings and that was air-conditioned by giant supply and exhaust hoses. The crowd surged. Jackson shook hands with Anthony Lewis of *The New York Times* and Albert Hunt of *The Wall Street Journal*; not far away were Ben Bradlee and Walter Cronkite. It looked like a social arrival — when some of his supporters among the help began chanting, "Jesse! Jesse!" Jackson, mingling with his richer public, did not even turn to them — but it may have marked a more interesting evolution in Jackson's political character. He was chatting and laughing with journalists, many of whom had been highly critical of him; having seen him surrounded by farmers or blacks and describing hospital bedsheets, foreclosures, and the need to soak the rich, they had regarded him purely as a protest politician. Here was a sign that social approval meant something to Jackson: that he shared other politicians' fondness for society.

His tour through the crowd that night, I later thought, did more than all the other gestures that week to prove to the media bosses that Jackson was a "professional politician," thus anesthetizing them to the once-painful idea of Jackson wielding power. What made the scene even more dramatic was that the host paper's chairman, Anne Cox Chambers, had been quoted in *Vanity Fair* as saying that it was "too



soon" to have a black president and that Jackson was "sleazy." Still, he'd come.

Throughout the tour Jackson's right elbow was pinioned by Bill Kovach, the *Journal and Constitution's* linebackerish editor, late of *The New York Times*. At one point Jackson whispered something to Kovach and Kovach lunged toward the bar, flinging Secret Servicemen and hangers-on to the side. Joan Didion was nearly knocked over. The candidate needed a glass of Coca-Cola.

If Kovach seemed anxious to please, so did his paper that day. It was so fat with convention and Atlanta-has-come-of-age stories that it was virtually impossible to know where to begin. When I did at last dip in, I was struck by the lack of discrimination in the coverage: the strength of the best stories was sapped by the proximity of others that made the same or related points. The Atlanta papers were simply printing too much. A thick, ad-free magazine, *Decision '88*, which was to be published every day during convention week, included such curious stories as "The Masters Means Golfing at Its Finest," about a tournament that takes place in April.

I got a *Journal and Constitution* bus back into town and dropped the paper's assorted party favors at my room. The hotel I had ended up in, the Barclay, was a few blocks away from the Omni but not on the list the Democratic National Committee had approved for the media. This was perhaps because it contained some glimpses of the other Atlanta, from a small coffee-colored transvestite wearing a shirt with spaghetti straps to a back stairway that homeless people had been using as a bathroom. The homeless had been moved out of the convention area, and it wasn't cool to talk about destitute Atlanta, as evidenced by the fact that *Decision '88* devoted just one page of seventy-two that day to the "other half," Atlanta's sizable poor population.

The next media party was just three blocks away, this one given by the Turner Broadcasting System at the CNN Center. Michael Dukakis was speaking from in front of a giant electronic flag whose stars blinked strobelike. When Dukakis was done, the press took over, a group of New York- and Washington-based journalists dominating the bar area, among them David Gergen, *U.S. News & World Report's* editor, Washington author Sally Quinn, and Gloria Steinem, the founder of *Ms.* CNN's press material for the event had listed the press guests— from Bradlee to Brokaw to Mortimer Zuckerman — before the names of the thirty governors the party was supposed to honor and the 150 members of Congress who also were to show.

Ted Turner had little to do with it. I ran into him in a closed bar in the back end of CNN Center, doing a TV interview and trying to get away. His hair was unkempt and his mustache was shaved strangely, an uneven quarter inch removed from across the top. He was talking about the arms race and the global warming trend.

I asked Turner whether he had had a chance to bring these things up with the politicians. He seemed annoyed.

"I just mentioned them really quickly. This wasn't my night tonight, this was the Democrats' night . . ." and he walked away.

He was about as odd as the other true media visionary at the convention. Allen H. Neuharth, the gnomelike Gannett chairman, had stood off to the side at his shrimp and oyster party that afternoon while the media establishment sipped frozen peach daiquiris. He wore a red shirt and a white jacket and fiddled with the giant diamond-studded ring on

*"Jackson whispered something to Kovach and Kovach lunged toward the bar, flinging Secret Servicemen and hangers-on to the side. Joan Didion was nearly knocked over. The candidate needed a glass of Coca-Cola."*





his left hand. Katharine Graham, Tom Brokaw, and Laurence Tisch, among others, had come to pay tribute, but Neuharth did not seem socialized, and when I asked him about the increased respect he had gotten from media powers that be, he responded opaquely in a twang. Pressed, he said that former *New York Times* executive editor Abe Rosenthal had apologized for once saying that he never read *USA Today* — he frequently reads it now — but then, Neuharth said, he doesn't really care what the people east of the Hudson and Potomac think.

**A**s the convention was to demonstrate again and again, the more reporters there are in a pack the greater the pack's attraction and the less inclined any individual is to go off on his or her own. The day after the big media parties I was walking through the Media Village when a pack swept down one of the corridors, and of course I fell in with it.

The Village was where the press were encamped in Atlanta, a 339,000-square-foot space in the basement of the Georgia World Congress Center that could easily contain several football fields and whose corner closest to the Omni hall was hung with skein after skein of brightly colored wires like a central nervous system, which it was. Each organization had either a plasterboard or curtain wall around it, though Gannett and the networks had virtual stockades. Many publications put out stacks of their papers, notably the *Journal* and *Constitution*, which in its need to fill space had become more oppressive than the heat that morning, devoting half of one page to photos of Walter Cronkite and Dan Rather at its High Museum party and most of another to a discussion of what media types were wearing (Cathie Black, the *USA Today* publisher, had on "a purple-and-white blouson jacket budding with huge flowers").

As it turned out, the pack I'd fallen in with was led by Gary Hart, who carried a white legal pad with a few pages of squared-off print, and it ended up at the Scripps-Howard pavilion, at a desk for the *Rocky Mountain News*. Hart was doing a column for the chain during the convention.

In the interchange that followed Hart was bold, testy, sitting up straight with that familiar icy smile. "I'm not a reporter," he kept saying, with a savage edge, and when I asked him what the relative status of journalists and politicians was at the convention, he said, "Of course, journalists have the highest status and politicians have the lowest. Always."

Was he being flip? And, if he was serious, could he elaborate?

"Of course, it was flip," he said.

"Well, I was confused."

"That was the point." People laughed. "Don't take everything so seriously."

But Hart's joke had some truth to it. He had been snubbed by Paul Kirk, the DNC chairman, and was never to be officially recognized during the convention (in fact he left early). Hart had not wanted to come as a delegate; I gathered that he wanted some loftier status. Hence the column.

Having read a couple of columns, which rumor had it were written *before* Hart got there and which were marred

at times by windbagging ("expect a deluge of bored punditry from those who only a few short weeks ago killed many trees to spread much ink in vain, predicting the usual chaotic Democratic convention"), I got the feeling that Scripps-Howard had been used. But it was hardly alone. The convention saw the birth of a unified Democratic party, delivered with Reagan-era propaganda skills. Its twin, or its afterbirth, some related trend, anyway, was the absorption into the journalism community of more and more political operatives with axes of their own to grind.

The causes for this are well known. The power of the party and its nominating convention has shrunk, yielding to the primary process, which is largely a creature of television (and therefore of fund-raising, the genius of the Dukakis organization). But TV is never sufficient in itself to form public opinion. What matters in the world of spin is how conventional wisdom solidifies over the next few hours or days, often in print. Political consultant Geoffrey Garin explained to me that Gerald Ford's giant 1976 blunder about Eastern Europe's freedom from Soviet domination wasn't recognized as such by the voters until the pundits decided it was, at which point it took on a life of its own. Or there was the view that jelled so quickly in Atlanta on Monday and Tuesday, Garin said, that in placating Jackson, Dukakis had not seemed "weak."

Just walking around the thriving Village you could feel the press's awareness of its role. *Newsweek* circulated a press release listing nineteen reporters and editors who were available "as broadcast guests" for radio and television interviews (to be arranged through a spokesperson), and when a delegate came into the Village and tried to take pictures of some news organizations, she was prevented from doing so. No wonder. It was as though the journalists, aware that the delegates had no power, meant to keep them in their place. As the political purposes of floor deliberations had diminished, delegates had attained curio status as gaily dressed flatlanders who thrilled when they were quoted about their jogging plans by *USA Today*.

**P**olitical people, meanwhile, were busy enlisting the press in a campaign to shape public opinion. Division 6 of the DNC's convention media operations was titled Spin Control Coordination (a handbook advised staff members to "track location of top Democratic pundits and operatives and work to coordinate their availability to print and broadcast media"). And the press ranks were full of politicians traveling as commentators — Hart, former Mondale campaign manager Bob Beckel, Geraldine Ferraro, former Arizona governor Bruce Babbitt, and Hart's former press secretary, Kevin Sweeney, to name a few. And, of course, America's hottest pundit, Norman Ornstein, of the American Enterprise Institute, who had gotten even hotter in Atlanta. I know this because AT&T had provided a special message service that anyone could phone into; the names of those who had been called showed up on TV screens. Walker Percy, Morgan Fairchild, Washington insider Anne Wexler, Pat Buchanan, and George McGovern each had gotten one message — Ornstein had four.

But the most curious incursion by the political community

on view in Atlanta was the ten-month-old *Presidential Campaign Hotline*, a daily computerized report that essentially covers the coverage, summarizing political stories from dozens of papers and getting out the latest line by 10 A.M. The service is run (and partly owned, profitably) by two political consultants — one Democratic and one Republican — and plainly has the effect of boiling down conventional wisdom that much quicker. I heard stories of reporters on the campaign trail who couldn't start the day without seeing their copy of *Hotline*.

One politico spoke of *Hotline*, with barely concealed glee, as a means by which the press could be all the more reliably shepherded. Imagine trying to convince one's editor of an original take on a development when he or she has just read what everyone else is saying in *Hotline*.

This was the overwhelming spirit of the convention (and the central discovery of the DNC): the more reporters there are, the easier it is to spread a line. The chief political purpose of Atlanta was to convey such a line — we know how to run things — and the press seemed generally obedient.

Air-conditioning and beer played a part in it. The DNC kept the World Congress Center remarkably cool, and a corporate sponsor, BellSouth, provided a thankfully curtained-off oasis on the second floor at which any member of the fourth estate with a badge (CJR included) could drink beer for free till he or she fell over. There were high-definition TVs there to take notes from and more patrons than at the protest site a block from the Omni, a large parking lot where some speakers had a lot to say but where the terrible heat drove all but the camel-glanded away. The DNC had also provided a second workspace for the *lumpen*, unaffiliated media, this under the wing of AT&T, which offered free phones and an endless supply of Coca-Cola and

coffee. Now and then we independents fought over a typewriter like refugees over a rice pot, but I found myself drifting back to this "Media Center" again and again for its busy aura, CNN TV, and conditioned air. Air and food seemed to guide the movements of many reporters. Some of the best political reporting of the week came from outside the convention — a piece in the *Journal* and *Constitution* about the reaction to the Democrats of Republicans on a golf course, *The Wall Street Journal's* analysis of Dukakis's appeal to the suburban vote. But as the week went on, those of us with passes stayed inside and limited our activities in the heat outside the halls.

**W**hen I got into the Omni itself, I went looking for Kevin Sweeney, the former Hart aide, in the studios of WAGA-TV, Atlanta. On Monday night I had overheard him say something it seemed only fair to clear up. He and I had been among a group of reporters who went from the Dukakis party at the Hyatt Regency to the Jackson party across the street at the Marriott Marquis, which was a jump across a cultural divide: the Dukakis party went on every night in the Hyatt lobby and was a comfortable mixture of reporters and politicians of the same socioeconomic stripe, with few blacks, while the Jackson party was movement people, mostly black. There had been some resistance that night to crossing the street. I had heard Sweeney say, "Could be dangerous."

Sweeney's booth was a box under the CBS booth, and he was slouched at a desk talking with a few other WAGA people. He told me that he had made the danger comment as an ironic rejoinder to another reporter who had said, "But we won't know anyone there," meaning the Jackson party.

The conversation grew relaxed and then Sally Sears, the station's political reporter, joined in and before long she



was explaining how the hall in front of us had been prepared for TV. Most halls are shoe boxes, she said, where the camera hits a lot of hard angles and reveals the limits. Though the Omni was quite small, the DNC had rounded off all the edges with curves and banked rows of seats so that on TV this bowl would look infinite. "They want this loving embrace of the TV camera," she said. "It always looks full, it looks like a jillion screaming Democrats."

Jim Axel — WAGA's big, amiable anchor — joined in. "It's like a slice of canteloupe. It's bowed in the middle, so it has a great sense of depth. You see it on TV — *whoa*, that place looks huge. It's the world's biggest TV set."

As prime time approached each night you could see the hall transform itself from a ragged assembly to an organic mass. The Dukakis whips on the floor were said to have things tightly controlled. Of course, for all the illusion of masses there wasn't much real room in the Omni, and in my comings and goings Tuesday night I was among those who got locked out of the hall before Jesse Jackson's speech when the fire marshal said, No more. I ended up at the police barricade in a mob that included about a dozen local television people. The local TV people made up about a third of the press corps — one reporter I had met came from Jonesboro, Arkansas, a city of 30,000 — and I often saw the two-person crews traipsing around looking for visuals. The reporter — usually a well-fed, middle-aged man — went ahead; then, lagging a few steps behind, came the cameraman, leaner, with the camera in one hand and a tripod over his shoulder, maybe a hat on his head. From a distance they looked like a banker and his caddie who had lost their way on a par-six hole. Their stories were not always penetrating. The bustling New South metropolis was the most obvious angle, and the teams frequently could be seen getting a glowing report from Mayor Andrew Young or setting

up across from the statue of progressive editor Henry W. Grady on Marietta Street. Once as I went by a reporter set his cigar down on a newspaper coin box, stood up straight in front of his cameraman, and bellowed, "Henry Grady called it the New South, but even Henry Grady would have trouble recognizing . . ."

Outside the Omni Tuesday night, though, the local TV people were steamed. They had paid for satellite time and had prepared their 11 P.M. reports with a gap at the start so that when the network feed ended they could jump in with a shot, from their skybox, of their local delegation reacting to the speech. I was squeezed up next to two congenial men from WWMT in Kalamazoo, Charles Cook and Barry Shanley.

"Sir. Sir. Could I have a word with you?" Shanley, who wore plaid suspenders, shouted at a police officer. "*Our spaces are empty*. There's no one there."

The officer held up his hands, but said nothing.

Shanley turned back to us, frowning. "If we're just a little bit more unruly we can turn this convention, which is supposed to be like 1960, into something more like 1968."

Some delegates were allowed in. One of them, a pretty Jacksonite, squeezed past us breathlessly.

"She's cute, roll on her," Cook said.

A cop came out and said no one else was getting in. Behind us TV crews turned on their lights and began taping and interviewing one another.

"This is insanity, this is why people hate . . ." Cook started to make a point about why people dislike the media, but dropped it for a point about the DNC. "Well. Who created this circus?"

*"I was among those who got locked out of the hall before Jackson's speech. A cop came out and said no one else was getting in. Behind us TV crews turned on their lights and began taping and interviewing one another."*



CJR/Edward Sorel



**A**t midweek, reporters were complaining nonstop about how it was a boring convention and there was nothing to cover, but few had the guts to pack up and leave. I heard a couple of politicians openly express delight at the way the reporters were partying and eating and relaying the happy message of the '88 Democrats.

The *Journal* and *Constitution*'s encyclopedic spirit was unabating. The fact that Garrison Keillor had led children in the national anthem showed up three times in the next day's edition. The convention had given the paper a pretext to sift every aspect of American culture for fresh insights. "The Singular '70s," an article in the daily magazine asserted, "were a frantic time filled with the helter-skelter of things gone wrong." The day after Jackson's speech a story on page one of the paper about how far blacks had come began its backward glance with an awe-inspiring subhead: THE 40S: JAPS BOMB PEARL HARBOR, ROBINSON BREAKS BASEBALL COLOR BARRIER.

Meanwhile, for chipperness, no one could match *USA Today*, which kept up its alluvium of facts on Wednesday morning with a long list of the Hollywood celebrities at the convention and a report on how members of the Illinois delegation weren't getting their wake-up calls on time and who from Virginia got to meet Sam Donaldson.

I had finally managed to tour the heavily secured Gannett stockade and gotten a glimpse of Neuharth's new information order. The TV worship was no surprise — there were banks of six TVs everywhere. Nor were the communal meals in the meal room, where Gannetteers were presented with a giant block of green gelatin encasing brightly colored vegetables and a vat of amaretto mousse that looked like lake foam. The interesting thing about the compound was that there was so little privacy; it was like a hive. Anybody could see anybody, and this social aspect of information gathering was reinforced by such invocations as (from a memo): "I will see you again Sunday morning at 8:30 for the MANDATORY Gannett rally starring [*USA Today* editor John C.] Quinn and Neuharth. . . ." The encircling environment had to alter the very notion of self and thus the notion of thinking for yourself. Who could prevail against such communiques as this, written by Ron Cohen, executive editor of Gannett News Service:

We must give the McNuggets [briefs] every bit the professional attention we give everything else. I realize some may think they are a pain. But be assured they are a necessary pain, a major reason you are going to the conventions. Your imprint is on the shortest stories every bit as much as on the longer, perhaps more satisfying ones. And I am positive everyone's high personal and professional standards will ensure that you all will do your utmost every time you sit down to a tube.

**T**he Gannett tour turned out to be good boot camp for hitting the beach with the Dukakisites Wednesday afternoon. The occasion was a luncheon Kitty Dukakis was giving for big fund-raisers at the Fox Theatre, the Moorish extravaganza on Peachtree Street. Fund-raising was one of the largely uncovered stories of the convention; as the delegates' function had shrunk to comic relief, the fund-raisers' function had become paramount, assembling

(and flattering and coaxing) the faithful to bring in thousands of donations at \$1,000 a pop. Organizing a base had been Dukakis's great strength, just as chairman Paul Kirk had made the Democratic party healthy at last by wangling contributions from individuals of as much as \$20,000. One of the convention's vital functions was to serve as a sop/celebration for big givers. If the *Journal* and *Constitution* and *USA Today* had spent one-tenth the energy reporting on funders that they spent chronicling the minutiae of delegates' lives, their readers would have been better informed about politics, but that would have meant tampering with an embedded and picturesque American myth about political life, *that conventions are about delegates*. The Kitty Dukakis event at the Fox Theatre, it seemed, provided one opportunity to break away.

Shortly after I got there, though, the doors of the luncheon hall were closed and the seventy or so press people were led away.

"We're not going to film any people eating," a staffer said, herding us along. Kirk could be heard addressing the crowd.

I hung back, fractious. A second staffer tugged my elbow.

"Kirk is just saying, 'Welcome, bluh, bluh, bluh, bluh.' You're not going to miss anything. Once you get out there they'll give you all the instructions. *Please, please*. Will you *please* leave. It's a private party."

I finally went into the holding tank, a stone chamber with a skylight and onion-dome-shaped arches.

"They said there'd be refreshments for the press," someone grouched, and then various lunch meats and soft drinks were wheeled in and for the few minutes before the tray was stripped bone-naked but for a split red pepper we were incredibly happy. Then our instructions arrived.

"What we're going to do is put the print upstairs, in the balcony, and everybody else downstairs," said Randi Lewis, a breathless woman wearing a dark print dress who is Kitty Dukakis's advance person. "What's going to happen is, you see, Kitty's sitting at the table up front. Hopefully, at some point, the governor — see, *Kitty does not know this* — the governor's going to be coming in to surprise her. Some people are going to be giving toasts, at some point the governor will arrive in this way: he will get up on the stage, she'll be surprised, hopefully we will move her this way and toward the risers, to go up on this side of the stage, so you can get a shot of her, the two of them, okay, the governor facing her or whatever. . . ."

"Whatever?" said Sam Donaldson.

"Whatever it is," she said, a little flustered.

"What do you have in mind?" he said. Everyone laughed.

This was the sort of orchestration of imagery Michael Deaver was famous for, and it went off without a hitch. As the program began, the photographers took their places on risers thirty feet from the stage, while the two dozen reporters were consigned to the balcony above the crowd. Robert Farmer, Dukakis's legendary finance chairman, gave a short, vague speech, then called Kitty Dukakis to the stage. She seemed a little befuddled. The applause built, but all eyes in the press gallery were on the side door. The governor



came coolly out of a crowd there and walked onto the stage. His wife, watching Farmer, didn't see him. Farmer pointed over her shoulder. She turned, she was stunned. Dukakis grabbed her in a bear hug and, for an instant that was filled with the winglike sound of a hundred shutters, grinned wildly.

**A**t the Omni that afternoon, I saw Art Agnos, the mayor of San Francisco, being interviewed. He was holding a book, and when I got close I could see it was Dan Rather's *The Camera Never Blinks*. Agnos told me he had bought the book more than ten years ago and had just jawboned his way into the CBS booth to get an autograph. Presumably, Rather didn't ask for one in return.

I hung around the Omni for awhile watching interactions between political people and the press, then went back to my hotel to watch the network coverage. There was a new transvestite in the elevator, much bigger, not so delicate as the one in spaghetti straps. On NBC the director was obviously resenting the newslessness of the convention and mixing in a lot of camera shots of people on the floor, not all of them flattering. There were big pores, sagging mouths, nostrils from below, a little like a Reginald Marsh painting of tumult on Coney Island. By then Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton had begun his endless speech and, as it dragged on, NBC pictured a series of four blacks in different places in the hall, apparently Jackson delegates, reading newspapers. Finally NBC broke away and Tom Brokaw and Chris Wallace commented cuttingly. ABC also broke away, but CBS

stuck with it till (this may be a Ratherism) the last dog was hung. The decision plainly reflected Rather's reverence for the process. At other times that night he spoke feelingly — if inanely — of the American system of checks and balances, and when yet another state chairman used the roll call on Dukakis's nomination to deliver a flowery tribute to his state, he commented, "Reeling off that kind of language is what makes this roll call such a piece of Americana."

The following morning the papers were full of fresh evidence that the convention was a media event. Large photographs of Michael and Kitty Dukakis embracing at the Fox Theatre appeared above the fold on the front page of both *The New York Times* and *USA Today*. The emphasis in the images was on Dukakis's face, as it was perhaps the first time that week that he had expressed strong emotion, the Dukakis people having wrung it from the stoical candidate by manipulating his wife and the press.

Meanwhile, ABC News president Roone Arledge had gone public with his criticism that the convention was a staged and boring event. He was threatening not to air even two hours a night of it in the future. This became the second big real news story of Atlanta, after the Jackson-Dukakis rapprochement.

That morning I had stopped in at CBS's pavilion to ask for a tour and was told there would be a press conference at noon in the CBS booth in the Omni. A dozen reporters stood outside, and as was so often the case at the convention,

*"Dukakis grabbed Kitty in a bear hug and, for an instant that was filled with the winglike sound of a hundred shutters, grinned wildly."*



CUR/Edward Sorel

one began interviewing another. A third commented wryly on the interview: "Reporter interviews reporter about press conference given about press."

The press conference was intended to put to rest rumors of tension between Walter Cronkite and Dan Rather. The two sat at the anchor booth while CBS's new broadcasting chief, Howard Stringer, stood nearby making witty asides. Just out the window behind them bare-chested men in harnesses dangled in midair on ropes, fastening red, white, and blue balloons to the Omni ceiling.

Rather seemed discomforted by the attention, and fidgeted with a paper clip. He kept insisting he was a "reporter," by which he seemed to mean, "I have not changed this event through my presence." Then, expressing dismay at Arledge's comment, he gave a TV-less rendering of the history of the convention: "Conventions are a chain of history that goes back to 1832, and we have to think not about destroying history but preserving it . . . If they don't do anything but stand on a floor of some hall such as this, and sing and mean it, 'Long may our land be bright with freedom's holy light,' I think that's a story, and I intend to be around to cover it."

Cronkite generally agreed. This wasn't surprising. When "The Star-Spangled Banner" was played every night, Rather and Cronkite got up from the table and placed hands over hearts, while Brokaw stood respectfully at the NBC window; Peter Jennings continued working at his desk.

At the press conference, there were no pieties from Stringer, who had just been promoted to responsibility not only for news but for the Miss Teen contest that was playing on a nearby monitor.

"Look, that's Wonder Woman," he said, gesturing out the window — and yes, Lynda Carter was on stage, practicing the national anthem.

Then Stringer said Cronkite had to leave for "an important interview."

I asked whom the interview was with.

Cronkite flushed and laughed and wouldn't say. "We're still competitors, you know."

Rather cut off the next question and, turning to me, said, "Walter has always been somebody who would prefer to do it rather than to talk about it. Walter Cronkite knows how to report — a master broadcaster. What makes Walter Cronkite Walter Cronkite is he's always reporting. He's not going to tell you who he's interviewing because he's working. This is a reporting interview. Not only isn't he going to tell you what it is, but if you follow him, he'll throw you off the trail."

In the end, the impression Rather left was defensive. He's become unpopular, and knows it. He may also have sensed that he had made the wrong decision about the interminable Clinton speech the night before. He defended it as a case of news values winning out over entertainment values — Clinton had been mentioned as a possible presidential candidate and people should learn about him. But the next night CBS cut away quickly from Ohio Senator John Glenn's speech introducing Lloyd Bentsen, while the other two networks stuck with what turned out to be a fine number. CBS was high-strung, unsure, and Rather was hobbled by the

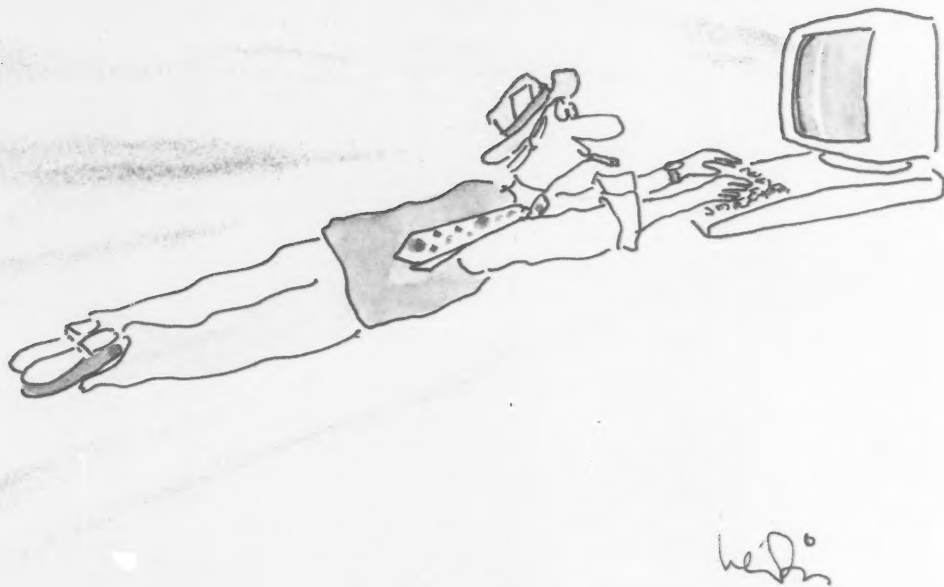
nostalgic conviction that he was still a *reporter*. But a reporter would have gathered or at least acknowledged what ABC's *Nightline* established later that night in an interview with the convention c.e.o., Don Fowler: that over the years television had forced open the nominating process and robbed the parties of power.

That last night I was out till 4 A.M., as I had been most other nights. The nights were the best part of the convention. Every night at the Dukakis hotel, the Hyatt Regency, the New York and Washington reporters and the Dukakis people intermingled, drinking till three or four in the morning. The parallel with 1960 the politicians kept invoking at the podium wasn't lost on any of us. There was a flickering generational hope you could sense that a victorious Dukakis would have his house journalists as Kennedy had had his Hugh Sidey and his Ben Bradlee. Or, more generally, that we were rehearsing for the time when northeastern establishment elites would again have power, when we would be insiders in D.C., a '90s liberal culture refitted according to post-Reagan rules of televised pomp, our own rough version of Camelot. The last night a story went round about Robert Healy, *The Boston Globe's* political reporter, sitting up at a party with Kennedy people and saying, "Dukakis needs a theme, and I've hit on it — We Can Do Better. How does that sound?" (Healy says it was 5 A.M., he's fuzzy on details), and someone else in the room saying they should get a Dukakis staffer on the phone.

One night when a group of reporters was discussing the floor schedule and the possibility of dissension over Lloyd Bentsen's nomination came up, a TV reporter spoke of the likely protester as a "knucklehead." Did a similar spirit of community unfold National Public Radio's Linda Wertheimer when she enthused, a few days after the convention, about the "bonding" that was taking place between Dukakis and the crowds on his first official campaign swing?

Of the thousands of reporters who were there, many described the stifled discourse and engineered unity of the affair, and others walked away rather than join the promotion, but generally the mood was celebratory, and the press in its delight at hailing a cool manager who actually might win seemed happy to be managed so as to send the correct message and improve his chances. The strongest memory I carried away from Atlanta was of the night a *Time* magazine limo carried five of us reporters (actually three reporters and a couple of political people *credentialled* as reporters) to a party at a club called Rupert's, and as the driver pulled into a shopping mall his radio dispatcher crackled, "Look for the Deli and the Pharmacy, it's just to the right."

There indeed was Rupert's, where that night Tom Hayden was having a party with a bunch of Brat Pack actors. The place was so jammed with glamour hounds we never got in, but we wanted to be a part of it — what a field day for the elite! At two in the morning we went looking for another scene, and ultimately went back to the regime-to-be at the Hyatt. For five days that was where all the energy was; that was journalistic enterprise. ■



# The data-base revolution

A look at how reporters are making use of a powerful new technology

by TIM MILLER

It didn't look like much when it was delivered to *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* earlier this year. Just seven computer tapes listing all real estate loans reported to the federal government by Atlanta lending institutions in the past six years.

Computerized mortgage data rank up there on the excitement scale with the mating habits of the newt. But records of 109,000 loans took on startling significance when a computer added them up and matched them district by district with sixty-four census tracts.

"The Color of Money," the four-part series based on the *Journal* and *Constitution* analysis, ran in early May and showed that whites were at least five times as likely to get home loans as

*Tim Miller is a writer and consultant who studied the uses to which data bases can be put as a research fellow this past academic year at the Gannett Center for Media Studies. He lives in New York City.*

blacks in the same income brackets.

The series stunned Atlanta, which had prided itself on its advances in race relations. Black leaders promptly called for a boycott of white-owned lending institutions. The Atlanta city council called a special meeting to discuss the revelations. And, only nine days after the series ended, the banks made available \$65 million in new money for home purchase and improvement loans in primarily black neighborhoods.

Computer analysis was crucial to the authority of the series. "It was the story. It nailed it down for us," says Dwight L. Morris, the *Journal* and *Constitution*'s assistant managing editor for special projects. "There wasn't one banker who said the data was wrong, because it was their data."

"Computer-assisted journalism is the new future of this business," says Morris, a former special projects director at *The New York Times*. "I loved the book

*Precision Journalism* [by Philip Meyer] when it came out fifteen years ago." The message Morris came away with was that "we must use the powers of computers to tap into the myriad data bases that are out there and, when they aren't there, build them."

These days, Morris says, "the news isn't just fires. The news is information. I think the whole business has to start looking at information differently. It's a matter of finding interesting patterns in life."

Morris is one of a new breed of technoscribes who are using computers to extend their reporting abilities. To get information. To recall information. To organize information. To look for trends and patterns. To compare, count, rank, sort. To keep tabs on the big guys and to look out for the little guys.

A reporter using a pocket calculator could, of course, have analyzed Atlanta's mortgage data. But it would have



taken about five weeks just to arrive at a total dollar volume of loans granted. The *Journal* and *Constitution's* computer, however, could not only add 109,000 numbers in a matter of seconds; it could group loans by census district or in accordance with other criteria.

"It's the same old journalism but with better tools," says Philip Meyer, who is now the William Rand Kenan, Jr., professor of journalism at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. "It's a way of keeping up with the information society."

**D**efined broadly, data bases are collections of text or numbers that are stored in computers. On-line data bases, of which there are now more than three thousand, are designed mainly for the retrieval of information by searchers who tap into a data bank through telephone lines attached to a computer terminal. In-house data bases are custom-built on the organization's own computers, which may range from mainframes to personal computers. Although in-house data bases tend to be structured for analyzing data as opposed to retrieving specific bits of information, the line between the two kinds of data bases is blurring. The basic function of the computer data base, however it is structured, remains the same: to organize masses of information into meaningful patterns.

The news media have steadily increased their use of on-line data bases since discovering them in the late 1970s. According to a 1986 survey, the number of newspapers doing on-line searching had quadrupled over the previous four years; in 1986, data-base use was reported by more than half of the 155 newspaper respondents.

Broadcasters, too, are going on-line. According to a survey conducted early this year by Thomas Jacobson, an assistant professor in the communication department at the State University of New York at Buffalo, more than 25 percent of broadcast stations in the top 100 markets subscribe to a commercial data base.

In-house newsroom data bases have been much slower to develop. These range from simple retrieval data bases to data bases that crunch numbers or that help detect patterns in vast stores of in-

formation. Late last year, *Newsday* used its newsroom computer as a text retrieval system to organize a book-length series on waste disposal. In 1987, *Seattle Times* reporters used a p.c. to help reveal patterns in the police investigation of the serial murderer known as the Green River killer. And, with elections just around the corner, a number of news organizations are compiling extensive computer files on campaign contributions.

While precision journalism would seem to be catching on, the man who wrote the book on the subject believes that journalists have been "awfully slow" in adapting computer tools to their needs. One reason for the long time lag, Philip Meyer says, is that "a whole generation of editors had to die off before [computer-based journalism] could really catch on."

The time is now ripe to pursue computer journalism. As an increasing amount of public information becomes computerized, the computers needed to analyze it are becoming cheaper and also faster. Meyer remembers analyzing data on an IBM 7090 that filled an entire room and cost \$500 an hour to use. He now has as much power on his desktop — in a \$2,400 Zenith p.c.

### Digital soup

All of the computer data bases now available to journalists share a basic characteristic that enables them to be fast and efficient: the data are digitized. Digitization is the conversion of numbers and words into a sort of Morse code of signals that can be transmitted at incredible speeds on the backs of electrons. Once digitized, a piece of information takes on properties entirely different from the properties of information in its printed form.

Take, for example, *Who's Who in America*. In the print version each word in the two-volume set is bound to one place only on a sheet of paper; the 75,000 biographies are arranged alphabetically. Thus, we can find Caspar Weinberger in the Ws.

In the computerized version, by way of contrast, each word swims around in a digital soup, ready to be dipped out in accordance with almost any criterion the searcher wants to specify. Thus, last year, when librarians at the *San Fran-*

*cisco Chronicle* wanted to find members of the secretive men-only Bohemian Club, they went to the on-line version of *Who's Who* offered by Dialog Information Services, a vendor of more than 300 data bases. Within seconds the computer located the word "Bohemian" each time it appeared in an entry. Among the club members found: Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger.

A search of this kind in the print version of *Who's Who* would have taken a reporter approximately eight years, not counting coffee breaks.

### Travel through space and time

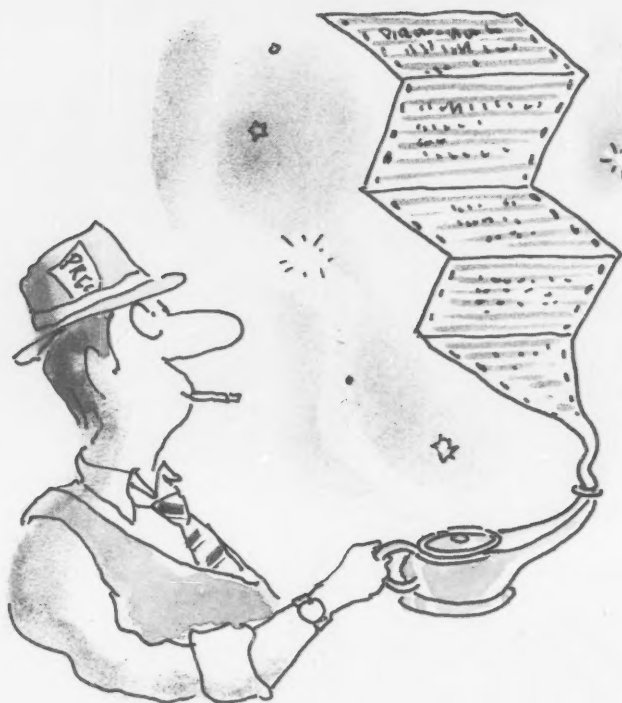
Journalists have always sought historical information and they have traditionally depended on the news "morgue" to provide it. Computerization makes instantly available a much richer body of historical material. The data base creates a sort of massive long-term memory that can spew out virtually any data a researcher specifies.

A chronology, for example, is a simple but valuable tool for analyzing trends and events. In the late 1970s, when he was writing *The Brethren* with Bob Woodward, then *Washington Post* reporter Scott Armstrong typed all his interviews with Supreme Court personnel on six-ply paper, then had a full-time researcher cut them up and reassemble them to form various chronologies that helped the two men put together a highly revealing portrait of the inner workings of the Court.

Nowadays if that same information were entered in a text-retrieval data base, Armstrong could, for example, simply enter "Burger" and "Brennan" and, say, "desegregation" and get a chronological list of all interviews in which all three words appeared.

The computerized data base can also be used to quickly follow word trails back in time in a sort of linguistic treasure hunt. Having heard a source mention the code name for a still-mysterious weapons system, the searcher may pull up technical journal articles in which the code name is mentioned in association with other related weapons systems that are known to the searcher. By examining in turn, in an ever-widening search, the context in which these new terms are mentioned, the journalist may begin to perceive patterns. "It's just phenomenal





CJR/Arnie Levin

what you can come up with," says Armstrong, now executive director of the National Security Archive, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that collects and distributes documents related to U.S. foreign, defense, intelligence, and international economic policy. Armstrong says that, by using this treasure-hunt technique with a commercial data base, he can in a matter of hours amass as much evidence as a five-reporter team working for a month — and at a cost of only about \$1,300.

**N**ot only does reporting involve going back in time to retrieve information, it also means going places. Because information in its fluid digital form can be "piped" at the rate of hundreds of words per second over ordinary telephone lines, it becomes unimportant where an information source is located. In a matter of minutes a searcher can gain access to anything printed in *The Financial Times*, say, or distributed by TASS. Closer to home, he can call up and scan the full text of about seventy-five dailies offered by two fast-growing newspaper data bases — Knight-Ridder's Vu/Text and Oklahoma Publishing Company's DataTimes.

Data bases shrank the nation a bit for television reporter Bruce Maxwell of WTOL-TV in Toledo when Northwest Flight 255 crashed one Sunday night last year in Detroit. Maxwell went directly to Nexis, a massive data base that contains the full text of numerous newspapers, magazines, and wire-service reports. Maxwell typed in the model of the aircraft and came back with a dozen reports about engine problems on that model. He reported the engine problems in a Monday evening news story that, he says, almost exactly mirrored the story aired on the *CBS Evening News*. "My stock at the station went up about two thousand percent," Maxwell says.

Thanks to the data base, Maxwell had access to historical copy from a variety of news sources; he also had a broad array of technical articles at his fingertips.

Cecily Surace, editorial library director at the *Los Angeles Times*, recalls that when she started work at the paper in 1979, reporters would come to her and say they wanted *Times* clippings only. Surace now spends half a million dollars a year searching non-*Times* sources for some of those same reporters. "We have broadened the horizons of the newsroom," she says.

## Journalists in analysis

At the same time that the data base allows reporters swiftly to conjure up the past and to roam at will across state and national borders, it gives them an almost infinite variety of ways to analyze data, whether those data be in text or in number form. Here is where the in-house data base comes in.

Late last winter *Newsday* assembled a retrieval data base to organize material for a ten-part series called "The Rush to Burn: America's Garbage Gamble." Editors created a special file in the newsroom Atex text-editing system into which went reporters' notes, hand-keyed campaign contribution data, and articles and abstracts brought in electronically from on-line data bases. With the collective memory provided by this system, a reporter writing about the waste disposal firm Ogden Martin Systems, for instance, could search the garbage file to see if another reporter's notes or an article had mentioned the company.

"Without that system we probably could still have done the series," says Thomas Maier, one of the lead reporters. "But an awful lot of details would have slipped through the cracks."

Reporters at *The Seattle Times* initially designed their data base to keep track of the murders of forty-eight young women, most of them prostitutes, by a person who became known as the Green River killer. After the killings had tapered off, reporters expanded the data base to analyze the handling of the investigation by the police, who had refused to discuss with the media any details relating to the case.

Two reporters spent months entering into the computer three years' worth of records of prostitution-related arrests, vice squad expenditures, and other information that showed where, when, and how the police deployed their personnel. Once the data were computerized, journalists could call up, for example, lists of arrests by month on "the strip," the area of the city from which most victims had disappeared.

Several patterns emerged. For example, when reporters pulled up 1984 data they saw a sudden spurt in arrests of "johns," men who patronize prostitutes. This tipped them off to what proved to be a major shift in police strat-

egy — a shift that coincided with a cessation of the killings. Last September in a six-part analysis of the police investigation, reporters suggested that the killings might have ceased earlier if only the police had not been so slow to focus on the johns.

“We could not have shown they screwed up without the computer to analyze the arrests along the strip,” says Tomas Guillen, one of the reporters who spent weeks entering data.

Guillen and Carlton Smith, the other reporter on the story, stored their data in the newsroom’s Atex system, later transferring the data to an IBM XT personal computer with enhanced storage. Both the *Seattle Times* and the *Newsday* data bases continue to exist as ready reference tools. *Newsday*’s garbage file has become a regular stop for reporters covering the waste story in metropolitan New York.

### Computer power and the privacy question

For months now, former *New York Times* reporter David Burnham, with the help of Syracuse University professor Susan B. Long, has been analyzing Internal Revenue Service data tapes for a book he is writing about the IRS. His computer runs show, among other things, that a taxpayer living in San Francisco is four times more likely to be audited than a taxpayer living in Rhode Island.

Burnham says that before government agencies began storing their data in computerized form, “it was physically impossible, mind-boggling, to analyze it.” He laments what he sees as a failure by most editors to use computers to help keep an eye on huge government agencies. “I’m not saying the press should give up covering what President Reagan said yesterday,” he says, “but I’m saying that every newspaper ought to have two or three people working on analyzing what government actually has done.” Newspapers should provide room in their pages for this kind of analysis, Burnham contends, “because the public agencies aren’t doing it themselves and most legislatures aren’t doing it either.”

Burnham recognizes the irony of the fact that he, who in his 1980 book *The Rise of the Computer State* warned that

large organizations could use computers to invade individual privacy, is now talking about individuals using computers to hold those same organizations accountable. Meanwhile, some journalists worry that the news media themselves will use their new data bases to invade

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**‘Once reporters  
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personal privacy; one newspaper librarian even calls data bases “very scary.” There is no doubt that the computer’s awesome speed and efficiency allows an investigator to draw inferences from what would otherwise have been an impenetrable mass of data. *Seattle Times* systems editor Steve Wainwright points out, for example, that reporters could check the Green River killer data base against the *Times* subscriber list to find out which prostitutes get home delivery and even who lives with them. “Once reporters get a gleam in their eye, they sometimes want to get everything about everybody,” Wainwright says.

**D**wight Morris of *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* thinks the news media will curb their own data-base appetite, much as they have curbed their urge to provide early exit poll results during elections. Burnham concedes that there may have to be “some kinds of restrictions on information which in paper form is harmless because it can’t be fiddled with, but which on computer tape takes on a meaning and a force” because it is more accessible and can be easily cross-tabulated.

Media use of on-line data bases may be restrained by the high cost of searching. The per-minute cost ranges from the equivalent of an interstate phone call to more than double the cost of a phone call to Tel Aviv, not including, in some cases, additional charges for printing. But, so far, searching doesn’t seem to be breaking the bank. According to a 1986 survey, only eleven of eighty li-

braries spent more than \$30,000 on on-line searching — roughly the cost of hiring a new reporter. Computer costs continue to decrease, while data tapes range in price from several thousand dollars to no cost at all in the case of certain government agencies.

Meanwhile, the cost of building one’s own data base is also coming down. Elliot Jaspin, a reporter for the *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, has spent about \$10,000 to buy forty-four tapes that contain everything from drivers-license data to court records.

Jaspin thinks that even small news organizations should be able to afford to do in-house analyses of public data, adding that for roughly \$10,000 a newspaper should be able to put together a microcomputer system that will enable reporters to use a p.c. to analyze government data tapes. Jaspin will attempt to put together such a system this autumn when he begins a nine-month fellowship at the Gannett Center for Media Studies at Columbia University.

Jaspin’s tape library (see “Computer Power in Providence,” *CJR*, November/December 1987) has become a standard newsroom resource to which he refers as regularly as he would to “a set of reference works.” The tapes complement each other. For example, computerized data from a Rhode Island-subsidized mortgage agency in 1985 helped Jaspin and six other reporters uncover a fraud case that resulted in twenty-four indictments.

When a judge sentenced the head of the mortgage agency, who had been found guilty of embezzlement and other crimes early this year, he let him off with a work release, commenting that similar sentences had been handed down for “a lot more serious cases than this.” Jaspin went back to the computer, searching through yet another tape, this one containing about half a million court records. He pulled up 183 work release cases for the past seven years, and found that one of four work releases had been granted to violent criminals and that a dozen releases were in clear conflict with sentencing laws. The resulting story appeared in the *Journal-Bulletin* a few Sundays later.

For Jaspin, the data base is a newsroom staple — “The best thing,” he says, “since movable type.” ■

# THE WINTERS



V.



# GREELEY LIBEL SUIT

by ROBERT McCCLORY

It has all the ingredients of a real pot-boiler — the kind of best-seller someone like, say, Andrew Greeley might write. But this isn't a novel and the plot is so complicated that it would test the writing skills of a Dickens in his prime. It's the forthcoming libel trial in Chicago that pits journalist James Winters against journalist-sociologist-novelist-priest Andrew Greeley himself. Among the institutions and characters involved in the plot are major elements of Chicago's press establishment — the *Sun-Times*, *Chicago* magazine, *Chicago Lawyer*, and the *Chicago Reader* — plus the Gannett News Service, *Notre Dame Magazine*, several reporters, editors, and lawyers, and, last but not least, Chicago's former cardinal-archbishop, the late John Patrick Cody, whose alleged indiscretions formed the substance of a major *Sun-Times* exposé in 1981.

What Winters wants from Greeley is \$3 million for having allegedly been libeled by him.

The story begins in Tucson, Arizona, where Greeley teaches sociology. It was

there that on March 27, 1980, Winters, a twenty-five-year-old editor at *Notre Dame Magazine*, interviewed the priest for a proposed profile. The account of that meeting and its follow-up are based on the sworn pretrial depositions of Greeley and Winters.

Greeley recalled Winters as "a nice young man. He was from the south side [of Chicago]. He knew friends of friends of mine. And I began to trust him." Winters was taping their conversation and at one point Greeley asked him to send transcripts of the interviews to his archives at Rosary College in River Forest, Illinois, a Chicago suburb. Winters agreed to do so; then, almost in passing, he added, "I'd like to see those archives." Greeley responded, "Okay." On the last day of his Arizona visit, Winters expressed interest in the manuscripts of one of Greeley's books, also in the Rosary College archive. "He asked if he could see them," Greeley recalled, "and I said surely."

Two months later, armed with these verbal permissions, Winters went to the Rosary College library and asked to see the Greeley files. The librarian showed him a storeroom containing eighteen boxes of unsorted documents, correspondence, and tapes, some of which were marked "top secret" or "personal and confidential." Assuming that Winters was a graduate student, the librarian gave him the key to the photocopying machine. Winters copied 200 pages of material, including some marked confidential; when he left he also took with him ten Greeley tapes marked "Rome diaries." During the following weeks, Winters began checking out the information he had gathered and preparing a manuscript based on it.

When Greeley learned of this, he was, he testified, struck with "terror." In late July he sent Winters a letter demanding that all copies of the material he had taken be returned and asking for "some guarantee that you will not make use of materials which are my personal property." He also contacted Father Theodore Hesburgh, the president of Notre Dame, urging him to intervene with Winters for the return of the archival materials. Hesburgh did so. Winters argued that as a journalist he had every right to the material but subsequently did turn over to Rosary College the copies

he had made — but only after making copies of the copies. He also copied and retained portions of the tapes before returning them.

In his pretrial deposition, Greeley maintained that when he told Winters he could "visit" the archive, he meant the term in an extraordinarily narrow sense. "Visit means visit," he said. "It doesn't mean open, it doesn't mean read, it doesn't mean copy, it doesn't mean remove, it doesn't mean retain after you've been told that you don't have permission to retain. Visit means visit! I think it's a clear word and the limitations in it are obvious."

Greeley also said he had assumed that his materials would be kept in a vault or some other secure place and was appalled to learn they were accessible to almost anyone. (He has since transferred his documents to a secure location at the Chicago Historical Society.)

Undeterred, Winters plunged ahead, eventually producing a lengthy article based largely on Greeley's taped "Rome diaries," which were addressed to the since-deceased James Andrews, chairman of the Universal Press Syndicate, the distributor of the priest's newspaper column. On them Greeley discussed at length his "plot" to get the liberally oriented Joseph Bernardin, then archbishop of Cincinnati, into the College of Cardinals and Cardinal Cody (described by Greeley as a "sociopath") out of Chicago. On one tape, dated January 20, 1976, Greeley said, "How do we get Joe [Bernardin] into the college? We get rid of John Patrick Cody. And how do we do that? We do an exposé soon. We turn an investigative reporter loose on the archdiocese of Chicago, a really good one, mind you, maybe some son of a bitch from out of town, an' tell him to blow the Chicago thing wide open. . . . How's that for a clever idea, coconspirators?"

For a period extending from the fall of 1980 through the fall of 1981, Winters offered his story to the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Sun-Times*, *Chicago* magazine, and, ultimately, the Gannett News Service. All rejected it, either because Winters's price was too high — in some cases he wanted a job in return for his article — or because editors regarded the priest's musings as fanciful.

At this point a flashback is necessary.

*Robert McClory, a staff writer for the National Catholic Reporter, teaches at the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. This article was adapted from one that appeared earlier this year in the National Catholic Reporter.*



In March 1980 Greeley had received another visitor in Tucson — Carlton Sherwood of the Gannett News Service (who, incidentally, was soon to share a Pulitzer Prize for the service's investigation of the misappropriation of millions of dollars by the Pauline Fathers). Sherwood was exploring the possibility of a probe of the Chicago church; Greeley was working on his first novel, *The Cardinal Sins*, one of whose characters is an archbishop who engages in activities very similar to those of which Cody was later accused. Greeley told Sherwood of Cody's questionable financial dealings and of Cody's relationship with a woman friend, often described as the cardinal's "cousin." Intrigued, Sherwood subsequently came to Chicago and began digging for information.

Last year, Sherwood told John Conroy of the *Chicago Reader* that shortly after he arrived in Chicago he was contacted by Roy Larson, then religion editor of the *Sun-Times*, now editor and publisher of *The Chicago Reporter*, a monthly newsletter. Sherwood told Conroy that it was Greeley who had tipped off the *Sun-Times* to his presence in Chicago: "Andy went to Roy Larson and said, 'You got a hotshot investigative reporter coming into town, he's gonna eat your lunch, he's gonna make you guys look stupid, he's gonna get Cody.'" (Larson, asked to comment on Sherwood's recollection, says that he does not recall the precise sequence of contacts, only that Sherwood's presence in Chicago provided "some of the internal leverage" to make the *Sun-Times* pursue in earnest its own investigation of Cody.)

Sherwood further told Conroy that Greeley had told him about the documents Winters had obtained from Rosary College, warning Sherwood that, if published, they could discredit Gannett's revelations about Cody: the public might conclude that Greeley was orchestrating the whole affair and manipulating the press for his own purposes.

Sherwood then met with Winters and suggested that the two might team up on the story. As they talked, Winters mentioned Greeley's musing on the tape about "some son of a bitch" investigative reporter coming in from out of

town. In his deposition, Winters described Sherwood's reaction: "Sherwood said to me, 'That is me. I am Greeley's hired gun. I am Greeley's investigative reporter.' And I said, 'You're kidding me.' And he said, 'No, I thought you had all this figured out.'" (Sherwood says this is an accurate summation of what he told Winters.)

In conducting his research, Sherwood recently told me, he had had a private meeting in Cincinnati with Archbishop Bernardin at which Bernardin claimed he was under orders from the Vatican to pass on to Archbishop Jean Jadot, then the apostolic delegate to the United States, information on Cody's activities. The purpose was to prepare the way for the Vatican's removal of the cardinal from Chicago. Sherwood said Bernardin also claimed that the Vatican had told him to "befriend" Greeley in order to keep tabs on a man church officials regarded as a loose cannon. Bernardin has declined to discuss that conversation in detail, saying only that Sherwood's account does "not merit credibility."

After several months of digging, Sherwood was pulled off the story, partly because his editor was made uneasy by the thought that Greeley's eagerness to expose the cardinal might be related, in part, to a desire by the author-priest to provide a dramatic backdrop for the publication of his first novel.

The *Sun-Times*, meanwhile, surged ahead and in early September 1981 began running its series on Cody, noting that he was under investigation by federal authorities for possible misuse of church funds and describing in detail how his "cousin" (who, as it turned out, was not a blood relative) had inexplicably become quite wealthy, while large amounts of Cody's discretionary funds could not be accounted for.

Later that month, as the *Tribune* struggled to find its own angle on the story, Rob Warden, editor of *Chicago Lawyer*, obtained the substance of the Winters article from a confidential source — Sherwood swears it was not he — and decided to print it. Three days before the October issue came out, Greeley issued a statement: "I am told that private diaries stolen from my sealed archives last summer are being used to prove that I have engineered the 'plot' [to get Cody]. . . . The theft of my private doc-

uments. . . [is] a form of psychological rape of which all the journalists involved. . . ought to be ashamed."

Seven months later, on the *Donahue* show, he flatly denied having given Winters permission to review his documents. When Donahue noted that Winters believed he had been granted such permission, Greeley replied, "Well, he's lying. I will say publicly on television he's lying. Nor did he have permission to take the stuff out."

It was on the basis of those statements that, in July 1982, Winters sued Greeley for libel, claiming that he "has suffered damage to his reputation. . . in the community. . . as a managing editor and aspiring journalist, personal humiliation, mental anguish and suffering, and he has [been] and will in the future be hindered in the pursuit of his chosen profession." Greeley countersued, charging invasion of privacy and theft, then withdrew his suit without explanation, perhaps because large amounts of his previously unpublished material could be demanded by his opponent's lawyers during discovery. For six years lawyers on both sides have been taking depositions and preparing their arguments. Now all is in readiness and the case will go to trial once the Illinois Appellate Court decides whether Winters may legitimately seek both compensatory and punitive damages.

Cardinal Cody is dead, Joseph Bernardin has become both archbishop of Chicago and a cardinal. Sherwood is now a Washington, D.C.-based consultant for television news services; Winters, who has held several journalistic jobs since leaving *Notre Dame Magazine*, is now free-lancing. Greeley, of course, continues to turn out voluminous amounts of material on dozens of subjects. When asked in 1981 about his taped "conspiracy" plans, Greeley said they "represent my own imagination and no one else's. They were dreams of many years ago which patently did not materialize." That, of course, is just the point: many of them *did* materialize. And now the novelist himself is caught up in a plot that will be played out, not between the covers of a book, but in the courtroom, and will be told by a host of journalists who may long to write fiction but meanwhile must stick to the facts. ■





# Why Chernobyl was a nonstory and other tales of *Indonesian* *Journalism*

by MARSDEN EPWORTH

Every morning, winds from the Java Sea slide over Jakarta, bump against the mountains south of the capital, and circle back, over and over, collecting the fumes of open sewers and garbage fires in a pall that blurs the horizon. At midday it rains. And after the rain, Jakarta — an equatorial city, a shimmering, steaming place of cow paths and office towers and street markets and gritty red dust, a democratic place where everyone votes for the same man, a puritanical place where hookers dress like schoolgirls, an orderly place where the military sits in parliament and the government censors the news — after the rain Jakarta gets hot.

It gets hot enough to flatten the mimosa and the banana trees that grow everywhere in the city, and the royal palms that line eight-lane boulevards, and the frangipani blossoming in suburbs that Indonesians say corruption built. At dusk, the city cools. Tiny bats dip in and out of the light and the neighborhoods smell of mosquito spray.

Into this closed city the landless slip, refugees from village life. They sleep in tin shacks that line Jakarta's canals where dead dogs bob and children bury their secret babies. There they live with their chickens and goats and TV sets the way they did in the villages they left — only in Jakarta there are more streets, more lights, more radios, more drugs, more crimes, more cars, more houses, more foreigners, more stores, more money, more people.

Jakarta is jammed with people, all kinds: bureaucrats, strutting and plump; generals, like the bureaucrats except for their monumental Rolexes; and matrons — the Asian ones in bright silks, a servant trailing with mineral water and magazines, the American ones with cropped hair, red nails, tight lips, plunging through the want and the mess on their way to the Jakarta Hilton for aerobic exercise and a glass of white wine.

And Jakarta is jammed with peddlers making up what the government calls "the informal sector." They sell noodles doused with hot sauce, or slices of mango and melon. They sell bicycle rides, clothes, antiques, motorcycle parts, caged

birds, tonics for health, for sex, for long life, ice, furniture to order, anything. Old men with nothing to sell collect the trash, sifting it first, then burning it in the gutter where small fires turn the leavings of bureaucrats and generals and all the rest into yellow smoke.

On Jalan Sangaji, a street lined with government offices, the peddlers sell ornamental fish. Somebody sells drugs, hash mostly and marijuana. And the *Indonesian Observer*, an English-language newspaper, sells information there, of a sort.

Shortly after coming to Jakarta in 1985, I applied to all three English-language dailies for work. The *Observer*, though homely and idiosyncratic, was my favorite. Its editorials twitting unnamed politicians and generals were the liveliest reading in town. The other two papers, the *Indonesia Times* and *The Jakarta Post*, churned out the government line with unwavering seriousness.

I met the publisher, B.M. Diah, in his office, a European sitting room with a Victorian couch covered in amber velvet. He wore a black cap — a *peci*, the mark of a Moslem and a patriot — and we talked about the *Observer*.

He founded the paper after the 1955 Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung, at which the country's first president, Sukarno, created the nonaligned movement. The idea, says Diah's wife, Herawati, whose title is general chairman of the *Observer*, was to give Indonesia an international presence, and to give the third world a voice.

Since then, Diah, once a journalist, then a diplomat, and later a government official, has become director of the Jakarta Hyatt. He is a respected man, a member of the civilian elite that shares power in Indonesia with the military. Now the publisher wanted to transform this crowded inky daily into something handsome and, well, "Western." I suggested a few changes, and he hired me. My job was to edit copy, set style, clean up the layout, write a little, teach a little, and make sure that the same story did not appear twice. I asked who wrote the editorials. Diah did not say.

We went upstairs to the newsroom, a seedy place where stray cats wandered. The windows were open and a half dozen fans pumped the smoke and the dust and the heat from the street around the newsroom, slowly, so as not to disturb papers on long tables set in a square. Teletypes clattered — Associated Press and Agence France-Presse in English, and Antara, usually described as "the quasi-government news service," in Indonesian. At the center of the squared tables the front-page editor, Gurbaks Singh, turbaned, bearded, and remote, a Sikh born in Sumatra, presided, a glass of tea and a typewriter at his elbow. He had the best typewriter in the newsroom. When it broke down, Singh would get the next best. He was in his fifties, the oldest man there and the most influential.

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Marsden Epworth worked as a journalist in Indonesia for two years. She now lives in Lakeville, Connecticut.



It was Singh who breathed a dated Britishness into the *Observer*, and a sense of classism and sometimes racism as well. It was Singh who made the paper crowded and hard to read. It was Singh who insisted that photos of President Suharto, Sukarno's successor, greeting his ministers or visiting a cement plant, embellish every front page. And it was Singh who had to be convinced that change would be a good thing.

Diah introduced me and left. I never saw him in the newsroom again.

The *Observer*, with a stated circulation of 36,000 — a number no one working there believed — was read by government officials, the military, embassy people, expatriates working in the archipelago, and, of course, the Department of Information. The paper had little advertising, one telephone, and five reporters. They covered foreign news, domestic news, city news, business news, and sports. Two of the reporters were employed part-time by the government, one in the Foreign Office, the other in the Department of Information. All of them were men. (Officials, it was thought, would not speak to women.) The roof leaked. The typesetters knew no English. One of the teletypes was always down. And the reporters took money from people they wrote about.

Singh explained how that worked. In the 1950s, after independence, government officials and businessmen paid reporters, usually free-lancers, a dollar or two at the end of a press conference. For carfare. Over time, however, reporters were expected to do more than write news. They were expected, along with every other segment of Indonesian society — the military, the professions, business, and the arts — to take a hand in nation building.

Naturally, a lot of Indonesian journalists have not always seen things this way. Mochtar Lubis, a contemporary of Diah's, wrote about government corruption and about student dissent during the sixties and seventies. His paper, *Indonesia Raya*, was closed repeatedly, first by Sukarno and then, permanently, by Suharto. He spent years in jail.

Other journalists who put a free press above nation building have lost the government licenses that permit them to work on a newspaper. Decades later they still may not work for any publication. So journalists who want to stay in the profession are careful not to antagonize the government or any of its supporters. The oldtimers know this. The newcomers learn fast.

In mid-1986, while I was at the *Observer*, the police dragged a young reporter for *Merdeka* ("Freedom"), another paper published by the Diahs, out of a news conference. His offense was repeating a question that military chief L. B. Murdani was disinclined to answer. And I was interviewed twice by an officer in the Department of Information after writing a story about East Timor, the island nation that Indonesia annexed in 1976. The government,

which confuses order with progress and criticism with heresy, has an unrestrained right to get the kind of press it wants. In return, the government gives papers a license to publish and a break on the price of newsprint.

But for all the constraints and occasional dangers of Indonesian journalism, the profession attracts people. As anywhere else, a reporter's job in Indonesia is interesting. It is also fairly secure. And in a country where information is guarded and much of it is secret, reporters are special. They are insiders. They are in possession of something valuable. They know things other people do not. This gives them position. They inspire awe. Like spies.

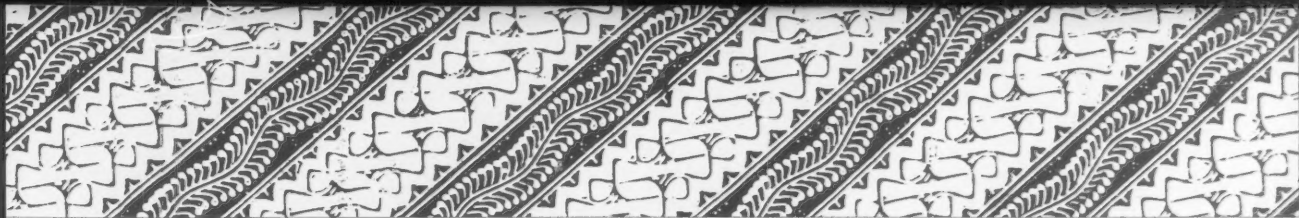
They also have little or no college education and no special training. If they can read and write, if they can get a security clearance, and if they can tell what news bolsters the regime and what news does not, they've got a job. And in a country with very few jobs, no welfare system, a fondness for intrigue, and a lively distrust of imported abstractions, reporters do not complain about a government-managed press.

What Indonesian officials call "a free and responsible press" is not only acceptable, it is celebrated by many reporters and editors. A free press like the Western press, they say, which would write about attacks on Chinese Indonesians, student demonstrations, and wasteful, government-arranged import monopolies, would create dissension and chaos in Indonesia. This country has seen factions and conflict and bloodletting, they say. It has seen riots and coups and plots and the murder of children. Now the country has order. And the press has a responsibility to help the government preserve that order.

When Antara reported a plane crash in Sumatra that killed a high-ranking military man, the information department ordered us to drop the wire story. No one argued about it. We just waited for the press release from the military that arrived, a day later, minus the eyewitness reports of a fireball breaking up the plane. In the official story the plane simply crashed into a Sumatran mountain. That prevented talk of a secret war between militant Moslems and the government, Singh explained. We never report anything that could be construed as dissent, he said. Not from Moslems, not from students, not from anyone. Never. Enemies of the state, communists, might use such a story to weaken what President Suharto calls his New Order.

Of course, this does not prevent English-language papers and magazines printed in Bangkok, Singapore, or Hong Kong from writing about dissent. But foreign publications are screened at the airport. The *International Herald Tribune*, *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *Time* magazine — all are censored.

Sometimes stories are snipped or whole pages are miss-



ing. Sometimes the print is slathered with pitch and covered with plain paper. (Whenever foreign papers or magazines are delayed, readers know the censors are at work.) As for wire services, the Department of Information monitors them, and although the department is said to have the technology to block stories from entering newsroom teletypes, Indonesian journalists do not think this technology is used. Indonesian journalists censor themselves.

When François Mitterrand came to Indonesia in 1986, he went to Bandung, a university town in West Java, to address students who had studied in France. Officials said later they had been apprehensive about this junket, but the French president had insisted. Suharto accompanied his guest to the Bandung Institute of Technology. We expected a routine story. When the Agence France-Presse story clattered into the newsroom describing 2,000 students chanting "Liberté, Liberté," and waving placards denouncing the government, the reporters were thrilled.

I wondered how we could get a photo of the two presidents awash in student protesters. I did not wonder long. Singh dumped the story even before the man from the Department of Information called. Students are not allowed to demonstrate in Indonesia. And, if they do, newspapers are not allowed to report what happened. Not a single major Indonesian newspaper carried the story.

The government is as sensitive about the foreign press as it is about its own. In April 1986 a story in *The Sydney Morning Herald* sparked a crisis in Australian-Indonesian relations. The piece by David Jenkins, who had worked in Indonesia for five years, likened Suharto to ousted Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos. Jenkins's story described a business empire fashioned out of banking, steel, shipping,

manufacturing, agriculture, real estate, and movie making, a \$2 billion empire nurtured by the Suharto family — the president's children, his brothers, and his wife.

The reaction from Jakarta was harsh and prolonged. The Indonesian government banned the paper, banned Australian journalists, refused entry to a planeload of Australian tourists bound for the Indonesian island of Bali, canceled seabed boundary talks between the two countries, withdrew from an Australian training program for Indonesian army officers, and called off technology minister B. J. Habibie's scheduled trip to Canberra.

Soon afterward, the government also barred two journalists working for Australian news organizations from covering President Reagan's meeting with Suharto in Bali.

Then the government ousted Barbara Crossette of *The New York Times*, in Indonesia to cover the Bali meeting, because a story about Asian governments in the *Times*'s Sunday magazine by A. M. Rosenthal vexed Suharto. She returned in 1987 for a brief visit and was barred again when she tried to come back for the parliamentary elections. Again she had displeased the president, a government official said: she had quoted a man named Slamet Bratanata in one of her stories.

Bratanata is a member of the Petition of 50, a group that periodically asks the House of Representatives for "a little more democracy, a little less corruption," as he puts it. Many of the group members are former government and military men who are sometimes characterized as disappointed outsiders. They cannot work in their professions and they cannot travel. Their phones are probably tapped and their mail is certainly read. Still, they are not in jail, as some of the government's critics are. And they are not in hiding.

They live like Bratanata, a sixty-year-old computer teacher, who resides in an old residential section of Jakarta. The walls around each house are low, not like those in the newer neighborhoods. And the houses are modest. Bratanata's, like his neighbors', is one story, a concrete bungalow with orange tiles on the roof and iron bars on the windows. He has a car, a driver, and servants, as most middle-class Jakartans do.

Bratanata, like Mochtar Lubis the journalist and like Diah the newspaper publisher, backed Suharto's rise to the presidency, and in 1965 Suharto, during his ascent to power, made Bratanata minister of mines. His job was overseeing Indonesia's richest resource, oil.

What was not part of his job was criticizing the military's reckless plundering of this resource. Oil money poured without accounting into the pockets of army chiefs who controlled the state-owned oil company, Pertamina, and Bratanata insisted on reforms. Foreign aid depended on it, Bratanata said. Finally, Suharto fired him. And twenty years

*At the Indonesian Observer, front-page editor Gurbaks Singh "breathed a dated Britishness into the paper, and a sense of classism and sometimes racism as well."*



Marsden Epworth



later he is still being punished, he says. Bratanata cannot get a job. He cannot get a bank loan. He cannot get a passport. He cannot leave the country. He is officially barred from writing, and his name cannot appear in print.

But he can talk. And he can listen. Everyone trusts Bratanata. He is a dissident, but not a malcontent. He is educated, but not foreign. He has held high office, but he is no thief. He is a faithful Moslem, but not a radical Moslem. He believes in democracy, but not Western democracy.

And when *The New York Times* and *Newsweek* and *The Asian Wall Street Journal* and other Western publications want information, their reporters go to Bratanata. So do government officials, military men, businessmen, bureaucrats, diplomats, and the Moslems. Bratanata deals in information. Censored information. Information no paper will print. For Bratanata, an unfree press is more than a fact of life. It's a living.

The *Observer*, like every other paper, was writing a lot of stories about the breach in Australian-Indonesian relations. But, like every other paper, we were not saying what caused it. We did not know what caused it. All we knew was that an Australian news story had offended the president. I went to Bratanata to find out why.

He had the story of course, along with an Indonesian translation.

I brought a copy of the *Herald's* article to the office and the reporters read it with great interest, but no one seemed disturbed by it. They had heard this before — perhaps not in such detail, but the president's business triumphs were

not entirely unknown. The president has certain rights, Singh told me, rights that foreigners do not understand.

A prince plunders. And if a prince plunders a lot, his subjects can plunder a little. So can reporters. The two dollars news people once got for carfare have turned into twenty dollars for applause.

Once I asked a reporter if he ever turned down the "gift" at a news conference. Never, he said. No one does that. At *The Jakarta Post*, editor Sabam Siagian collects this money from reporters and puts it into an emergency fund for the staff. But he never tells them to turn it down. Breaking custom is hard anywhere.

A few weeks after joining the *Observer* I started going to press conferences. My first was for Rabo Bank, a Dutch firm expanding its investments, particularly its agricultural investments, in Indonesia. True, commodity prices were low, explained the bank officers, but cocoa and rubber and palm oil prices would not be depressed forever. And when the market improved, Rabo would be in a position to profit.

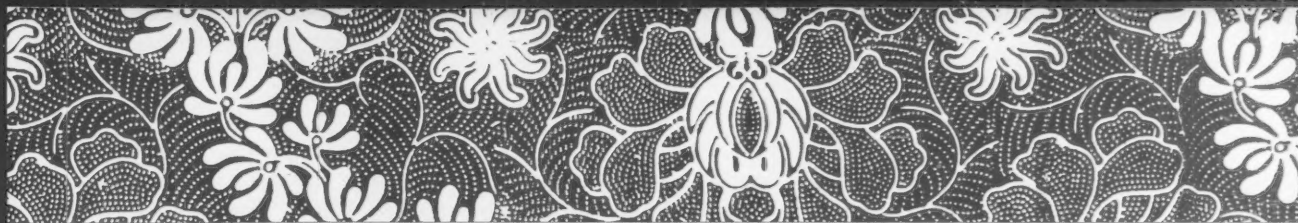
The news conference was held in one of Jakarta's new commercial towers, glassy, hard, and cool, homages to Western-style development. A dozen reporters drank tea and ate cake and asked questions, good questions, I thought. As my 6 P.M. deadline neared I packed up, leaving the others at the table, and headed for the elevator. The floor was marble, the walls were concrete, and the sound of every footfall bounced off the hard surfaces. I heard steps behind me. I moved faster. So did the steps. Heading for the elevator, I broke into a trot. So did the steps.

Andrew Holbrooke/Black Star



In Suharto's New Order, portrayed in this Jakarta billboard with the military, significantly, on top, the government insists the press is free — free to help the Suharto regime maintain its hold on power.





A bank officer was calling after me. He was running. I was running. "Wait. Your gift. Your gift," he called.

What I wanted to do, of course, was to turn suavely and deliver a brief but gracious word on the independence of the press. Instead, I escaped into the elevator. Mortified.

This money does not buy an obedient press. It buys a laudatory press, a fawning press, a press that manipulates information just as the government does, not for order, not for the president, not for nation building, but for personal gain. The press in Indonesia has gone into business for itself.

One day, Diah called upstairs and ordered Singh to attend a press conference for Indomilk, an Australian-Indonesian milk-processing plant in Jakarta. Before Citibank and Unilever and Fairchild and 3M and Exxon and Johnson & Johnson, and all the other corporations attracted to Indonesia by its cheap labor and its political stability, sent Westerners to this tropical archipelago, milk was rare. By the mid-eighties, though, thousands and thousands of expatriates stationed all over Indonesia wanted milk. And they got it: dried milk, canned milk, irradiated milk, and, best of all, fresh milk. Indomilk was the major fresh-milk processor in the country. So when most of the International School population in Jakarta succumbed suddenly to a bacterial infection, Indomilk was named the culprit. The government closed the plant for two weeks and, when it reopened, the company called a press conference.

All the major dailies sent reporters. All the major dailies wrote stories. But Singh's alone ignored the medical reports and the laboratory analyses and the closing of the plant. Instead, his piece elaborated on the company's fastidious procedures, its spanking clean equipment, and its rigorous supervision of its staff. The story, which went to press on my day off, stunned me. Singh, however, was mute on the subject until a few weeks later, when he told me the paper was docking his pay for two months in connection with the Indomilk story.

It was, as Herawati Diah later observed, "a promotional piece." Indomilk paid Singh for this promotion, she told me, and that was wrong. Indomilk should have paid the paper. As she explained in a memo, "No one is allowed to write promotional articles on products without [obtaining] ads." Indomilk did not take an ad. So Singh's pay was docked the amount that the promotion, in management's view, merited.

In the end, Indomilk took an ad, but not as big an ad as Diah had anticipated. Singh got his "gift" and went back on salary. The *Observer* took in a little extra revenue. And nobody worried about the readers, which is the way things generally worked.

Reporters were usually willing to manage the news for cash, or maybe for lunch at a five-star hotel. But sometimes they did it just to exercise power.

When news of an explosion at a Russian nuclear power

plant came clattering over the teletype, I asked Singh to call his friend the press secretary at the Soviet embassy for comment. The press secretary told Singh the story was false, fashioned to embarrass the Soviet Union. There had been no explosion at Chernobyl.

I cut his remarks into the wire copy, which was slated for page one, and went home. But next morning the *Observer* had no Chernobyl story, not on the front page, not on any page. The Soviet embassy denied the story, Singh explained. So he killed it. The *Observer* was probably the only paper in the world that had the story and did not use it because the front-page editor wanted to do a favor for a friend. He liked attending embassy receptions.

Maybe the publisher did, too.

Like other foreign reporters, I befriended Indonesia's public dissenters. Bratanata I saw often. Sometimes in the afternoon, before evening prayers, I visited him in his dark sitting room with the stone floors. We ate cake his wife had made and drank tea. He would bring to events information he had picked up from all the people he talked to all the time. He enjoyed this. He held court. Sometimes he grumbled about foreign reporters not paying him for his time and his information. When I asked if he worried about the risks, he shrugged, saying that a man can only live with what is right.

One day as I left his house for the paper he handed me an envelope, a familiar envelope, sealed and unmarked, exactly like an envelope I opened every day at the *Observer*. In the car I opened it. It was an editorial for the *Observer*. This dissident whose mail was opened, whose phone was tapped, whose driver probably reported regularly to KOPKAMTIB (the military branch in charge of security and order), as drivers were reputed to do, this maverick who implicated the Suharto circle in the murder of a young woman, who told reporters how Suharto joined the military (it was either the army or prison), this nonperson whose name could not be mentioned, even in a foreign newspaper, was not only writing, he was writing all the editorials for a newspaper, a government-supported newspaper. He was shaping policy at a major daily and meeting foreign diplomats and complaining to the legislature with the knowledge and approval of the government.

Bratanata is part of an opposition that serves the government. When the West wants dissidents it goes to Bratanata and his friends. It does not go to the artists or the intellectuals or the Catholic priests or the radical Moslems or the students. It does not go to the people in jail.

It goes to people like Bratanata who have a stake in the way things are run in Indonesia. It goes to people who benefit from a managed press, whose status and livelihood depend on it. ■

# After the cutbacks: what's the damage to local TV news?

by NEAL ROSENAU

"Welcome to the real world," says Harry Fuller, describing how he runs his television newsroom at KGO in San Francisco. It was only five years ago, Fuller recalls, when news people were reporting on cutbacks in the aerospace, automotive, and oil industries, while television itself "merrily went along its way assuming fifteen percent profit increases every year, spending money like it was going out of style."

Fuller took over as news director at KGO, the ABC-owned station in San Francisco, in January 1985, a year before ABC was merged into the Capital Cities empire. "Suddenly," he says, "you have to watch where you spend your money. You have to pay attention. You can't have ten to fifteen percent overruns and feel that it's going to be okay."

Harry Fuller's experience was hardly unique: in a change felt throughout the nation, the end of the 1980s became the Age of Austerity for local television news.

While the effects of cutbacks in *network* news have been analyzed and agonized over for nearly three years now, most notably in a jeremiad by Dan Rather on the op-ed page of *The New York Times*, little attention has been paid to the effect of economic restructuring on *local* television news. It is, admittedly, a difficult business to survey, in part because the quality of local TV news varies greatly, both between cities and within individual markets. At the same time, it is an important part of the nation's information web: many local stations broadcast more news, in terms of

*Neal Rosenau worked for eleven years in local television news — in Chicago and in Portland, Oregon, and, most recently, as a correspondent for WCBS-TV and WNBC-TV in New York City. He is now a free-lance writer.*

airtime, than any network except CNN. Being local, they presumably cover events and trends that are of the most immediate importance to their viewers. Moreover, many local stations have begun covering national and international stories as well. So local news deserves close attention.

In an attempt to discover how local television news is coping in the Age of Austerity, I spoke with news directors and working journalists in TV newsrooms from coast to coast. I have also



drawn on my own experience as a reporter working through cutbacks at the flagship stations of two major networks in New York.

A former local news manager recalled the beginning of the change at the CBS-owned stations. It was 1985. Ted Turner was trying to buy the network. And Van Gordon Sauter, executive vice-president of the CBS Broadcast Group, opened a meeting of his lieutenants with the words: "Gentlemen, we're headed for an economic shit-storm."

The storm has been nationwide, precipitated by the Turner affair at CBS, by new bottom-line management at all the network-owned stations, and by general market conditions. Everywhere, local

broadcasting executives have watched VCRs and cable systems cut into their audience. Half the television households of America now have cable.

As profits dropped, owners looked for ways to scrimp. And local news — usually the biggest expense item in a local station's production budget — had to do its share. Minimally, this meant that news directors could no longer view their budgets merely as guidelines. Now, every news director I talked with said that he had to draw up a *true* budget and then stick to it.

Beyond this, bottom-line management has imposed cuts — often major ones — as revealed in an annual survey conducted for the Radio-Television News Directors Association by Vernon Stone, a journalism professor at the University of Missouri. Stone's survey, released in March, showed that the news staffs at network affiliates in the twenty-five largest television markets had dropped by an average of more than 7 percent from 1986 to 1987. In the next-smaller set of markets, those ranking in market size from twenty-sixth to fiftieth, news staffs were cut by almost 5 percent.

In some cases the cutbacks have wrought little damage. Indeed, at virtually every station I called I heard stories of money-saving changes that became obvious only when they became imperative. At WCBS in New York, for example, newsroom managers determined that the only job some production assistants did was to separate five or seven copies of each script from carbon-paper interleaves. "So if somebody ripped script for two shows," says news director Paul Sagan, "they would do two or three hours of work and then have five hours of down time." WCBS eliminated those positions. Many stations in large markets are turning to new technology to cut costs — for example, by

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Major cutbacks do, of course, damage newsroom morale — and the damage can be long-lasting. One newsroom manager at WNBC in New York told me of weary producers and writers, five months after cutbacks there, complaining of frustration and exhaustion because the newsroom had too few people to do the quality of work they believed they should be doing.

At WABC in New York, reporter Louis Young put it this way: "The fat is gone — long gone — and we're down to the muscle."

At WABC, management cut camera crews, tape editors, and writers, trimming the staff to such a degree that former producer Jim Murphy describes those who remained as being "so rushed they can't check things." Reporter Young agrees: "Before, when things got on the air that were wrong, it was probably the result of incompetence or laziness. Now it's built into the system. The time runs out and you can't check it."

Compared to the layers of editing at the network level of television news — at newspapers there are even more layers — precious little checking was ever built into local TV news. One producer or managing editor might be assigned to read reporters' scripts, but often that person was only vaguely familiar with the main facts and was usually overburdened with writing or other preparations for broadcast.

**A**fter the cuts, checking all but vanished. I worked as a reporter at WNBC after dozens of newsroom positions had been eliminated. In the three months I worked there after the cuts, no producer questioned a word of any script I wrote. Nor did any news executive, producer, or editor ever screen a finished package before it went on the air; the reporter was the final check for completeness and accuracy. At WCBS, on the other hand, even after newsroom operations were streamlined in 1986, the managing editor was required to screen each piece before it was aired. And, as a rule, she did so, although she often watched it at double-speed (so the reporter's words sounded like a fast-talking Alvin the Chipmunk)

and while she was on the phone trying to troubleshoot other deadline problems in other editing rooms. Little wonder that errors slip through.

News executives who have made major cuts deny that they miss stories as a consequence. The only comment WNBC's then-news director John Lane made when he declined an interview for this article was "I guess we're doing all right. We still cover the breaking news." In San Francisco, KGO producer Dawn DeAngelis said, "I don't think we miss stories. We are news people, and whether you have ten people or one person, if there's a news story we're all going to move on it." Other news directors made similar comments.

But less staff often *does* mean fewer stories. At WNBC, newsroom execu-

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**'Often the stations  
don't even cover  
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They run a public relations  
handout called  
a video news release'**

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tives admit off the record that they have missed stories because of the cutbacks. In Portland, Oregon, KGW's news director, Reagan Ramsey, says that he sees the changes austerity has brought at rival KOIN: "They go with longer live shots, real long talkbacks, and that kind of stuff. So the substance of what they cover may not have changed, but the amount they cover has. Instead of doing twenty-five stories a night, they do twenty." KOIN's news director, Craig Kuhlman, disagrees. "Budget constraints have not affected any of that," he says. He has avoided cutting staff by "closely managing resources" and, he says, "I would imagine the story count has actually increased."

Staff members at New York's WCBS perceived a reduction in quality of their news product when their station went through controlled shrinkage two years ago. The newly appointed news director, Steve Wasserman, instituted more live shots, more anchor interviews, more material from syndication services, more

graphics and "teasers" that took up airtime. It was difficult to distinguish which changes were effects of the cutbacks and which were merely Wasserman's egregious showmanship, as when, one January day, he ignored other stories in the city so he could put on eight separate reporter packages covering a two-inch snowfall.

Most news directors, even after cutbacks, try to cover as many of the breaking stories of the day as they can — what WABC assignment manager Bill Carey calls "the perishable news of the day." Others might call it chasing ambulances, cops, and fire trucks, but this policy assures even a lean news operation of having the day's headlines covered.

So what doesn't get covered? "I don't think anybody misses the major stories," says Reagan Ramsey at KGW in Portland. "I think it's the next level that any reduction of news capability will miss — being able to go beyond the obvious breaking news story." A story, he adds, "where they will say, 'What does the redistricting plan mean to the east quadrant of our city?' — they won't cover that. Or if you're going to have a drought in southern Oregon, what does that mean to the farmers in that area now and how will that be reflected in food prices next September?"

In San Francisco, producer Dawn DeAngelis described a change after the cutbacks at KGO: "Now we approach a story from a very straightforward point of view, whereas before we used to take various angles on a story. If everyone else was at a news conference, if we had that little extra time on that given day, we would do a sidebar on that story. Now the sidebar is the day after."

At the same time, KGO news director Harry Fuller recognizes that "our audience demands an explanation of what's going on and why." To fill that need with a smaller staff, he says, "means reorganizing our priorities. We don't cover every two-bit fire that comes along any more, I don't care how good the pictures are." He would rather miss three news conferences in a day, he says, if it means a reporter will be "sitting down, doing some work, getting on the phone, coming up with graphics, and really explaining the story."

That's basic good journalism, of course. Unfortunately, the reporter in a





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into helping feed needy**

Louisville Courier-Journal 11/22/95

**Jerk Injures Neck, Wins Award**

The Buffalo News 4/6/83

**Flier to duplicate Miss Earhart's fatal flight**

The New Jersey Herald 7/3/84

**Italian gunmen  
shoot typesetter  
by mistake**

The Philadelphia Inquirer 9/3/83

**His humming rear end  
is a major distraction**

The Toronto Star 1/6/86

**Police Discover  
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cut-back newsroom may find he's doing *all* the reporting work and *all* the production work he did before the cuts, *plus* all the work of a now-departed researcher or writer-producer. "There's less and less time for me to be a reporter," says Louis Young at WABC. "Everything I had done for me before, I now have to do myself. My time is consumed with production duties."

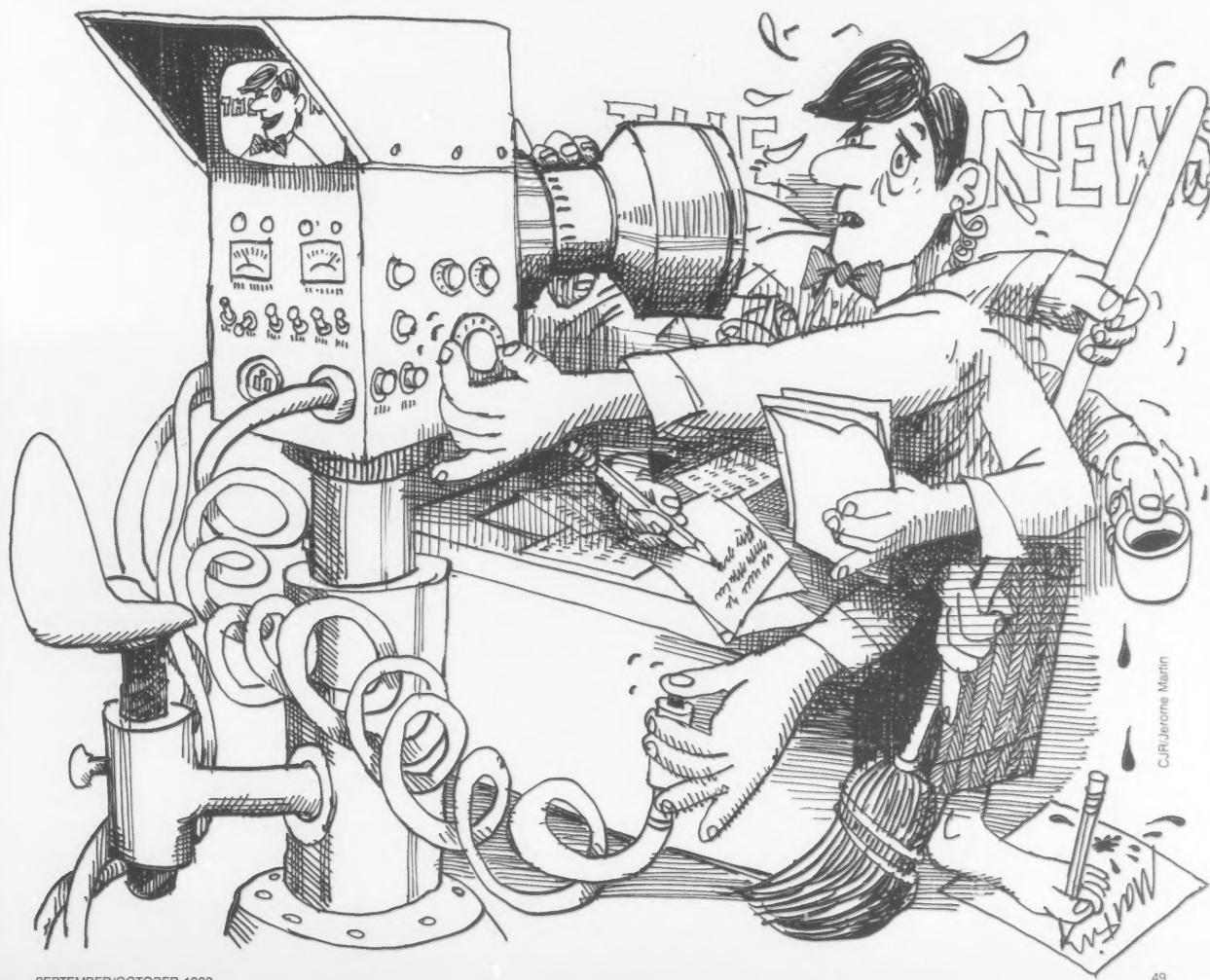
Given the present situation, in which on-air reporters have less time to report and there are fewer behind-the-scenes people to do the research, it is hardly surprising that a public relations executive — Jan Van Meter of Fleishman Hillard in New York — should say that he sees more and more local news being generated by p.r. firms. News conferences and press announcements become tempting subjects if you must fill up the same airtime but have fewer people to

dig up real news. "They're all legitimate news stories," former WABC and WCBS producer Jim Murphy says of such items. "But, if you had your druthers, you wouldn't put them on television." Shorthanded news staffs, he says, "compromise because they have to. They've got to fill the two hours."

**O**ften the stations don't even go to cover a canned event themselves; they run a public relations handout called a video news release. VNRs are one of the hottest items in public relations today — tape packages produced by p.r. firms for companies that want a mention on the news. For instance, pharmaceutical firms disseminate information about new drugs in ninety-second releases that look like news reports — cover pictures, interviews, and a newsy narrative that may

be written and voiced by a laid-off news reporter. Toyota got its image on the screen by sponsoring a VNR about a new breed of high-tech magazine ads, including one the automaker took out with 3-D glasses folded into the slick pages. The Rowland Company in New York produced a VNR on a news conference called by Northwest Airlines to announce its total ban on in-flight smoking. Hillary Martin, senior vice-president for video production at Rowland, says that the spot was picked up from a satellite feed and used, in all or in part, by more than 100 stations nationwide.

News directors in large markets will tell you they don't use VNRs. "There's a lot of it available," says Harry Fuller at KGO. "You could probably fill three hours a day if you just put a satellite dish up and recorded it all. We rarely use it." But his broadcasts do occasionally use



C.J. Jerome Martin

pictures from those VNRs. When I talked with KGO's tape editing supervisor, Bill Romano, he said, "We're working on a couple of stories today, both using handout tape." One, he said, was on cockroaches, the other "on some material that looks like snow. It's clearly commercial." But, he emphasized, such items do not typify his station's broadcasts.

Romano went on to say that his editors are aware that the quality of the material

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**'In an age of austerity,  
investigative reporting,  
which doesn't come cheap,  
is easy to drop.  
So, too, is hard news'**

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they edit has deteriorated since the cutbacks: "We used to have a lot of people involved in special projects, but we're not doing that any more." The station, he added, "used to be pretty fearless in the types of things we would go after. We would take on anybody." Now the special projects units and the investigative unit are gone and the KGO news "is probably half again as soft as it was before."

News director Harry Fuller sees things quite differently. His view is that the old system of special projects simply bred waste. "There were," he says, "a lot of jobs that took longer than they needed to just because there were more people than we needed." Nothing essential was lost in the cutbacks, Fuller contends. The staff reduction simply meant "redirecting the efforts of just about everybody on the staff to working on today's news or stuff that's going on the air in two nights."

KGO is by no means the only station to have eliminated its investigative unit. WABC in New York did the same thing after the Cap Cities merger. And, nationwide, while the top 100 television markets have seen average staff reductions of between 5 and 7 percent, personnel devoted to full-time investigative reporting have been cut a startling 40 percent, according to a survey conducted by Charles Burke, associate professor of journalism at the University of Florida.

(Burke polled news directors in the top 100 markets, first in 1983 and again in 1987; his findings were published in the spring issue of the journal put out by Investigative Reporters & Editors.)

Clearly, in a time of austerity, when news directors are trying to get the most airtime for every dollar spent, investigative reporting, which does not come cheap, is very easy to drop.

So, too, is hard news in general, if what's happening in Kansas City is any indication. Barry Garron, TV critic for *The Kansas City Star*, spent five days in April taping news broadcasts of his city's three network affiliates, then used a stopwatch to find how much time each devoted to news, weather, and sports. He has done this every other year since 1982. "This survey indicated the amount of time given to news reporting is getting smaller," Garron wrote. On two stations "the average half-hour newscast now contains less than ten minutes of news." The other station averaged eleven or twelve minutes per half-hour. Garron applied "a liberal interpretation of news." He discounted "time for fluffy features, endless happy talk, and teasers about coming stories," but counted as news "a feature on a Delaware cat that cares for squirrels, a piece on a trick-shot artist who used dominoes and pool balls, and a story about Tulsa, Oklahoma, boys who protested school policy by wearing skirts to school."

**F**ortunately for viewers who like their news straight and strong, the picture is not universally bleak. Not every station has cut back its commitment as it cut back its staff. In San Francisco, KRON still has its investigative unit, and it airs a special segment every day. News director Herbert J. Dudnick says that management has "a very strong commitment to news."

I also heard about management commitment from Reagan Ramsey at KGW in Portland, a station owned by the King organization of Seattle, one of the few privately held broadcast companies in the nation, and one that regularly wins major national journalism awards. "They never come and say, 'How many tenths of a rating point have you changed?' They say, 'What are the things that you've done that really affect your viewing area, and what have you

got planned for this next quarter and next year?'"

At WCCO in Minneapolis — which last year won a Peabody, a DuPont-Columbia, and a national Emmy, among other awards — news director Reid Johnson spoke of a strong management commitment to "keep their values straight. There are a number of stations whose essential character has been lost as they've gone through the battle of reorganizing financially. I think the challenge for us will be looking at the menu of things we do here and putting high priority on public affairs and the journalistic value we attach to them." But he said he expects to delete or delay some items on his menu in the year ahead.

The most striking effect of management commitment, for New York viewers at least, has been at WCBS in the year and a half since former local and network news executive Eric Ober took over as president of CBS's television stations division. Insiders say it was Ober who engineered the departure of Steve Wasserman as WCBS news director, to be replaced by a young executive producer, Paul Sagan. Now, Sagan says, "the thing that is setting our station off from our competitors is the ability to do enterprise, to say, 'Look, we don't have to have every reporter do a story every day; if you need two days, take it, because the payoff will be greater at the other end.'" The result is that, while WABC is concentrating on the perishable and WNBC finds its "slump" headlined in *New York Newsday*, WCBS is increasing its ratings.

It is clear that the Age of Austerity has not reduced the diversity of approaches to local television news. In fact, it may be defining the differences more clearly. Harry Fuller in San Francisco observes that most stations are now in a "period of adjustment from overspending to being responsible and understanding what it takes to do the job."

The only sure thing about this period of adjustment, in the words of Portland's Craig Kuhlman, is that "the ones who survive as news directors are really good administrators." It does not follow that all of them will necessarily be good journalists as well, or that good news people will not have their journalistic souls cut out by the budget knife. ■



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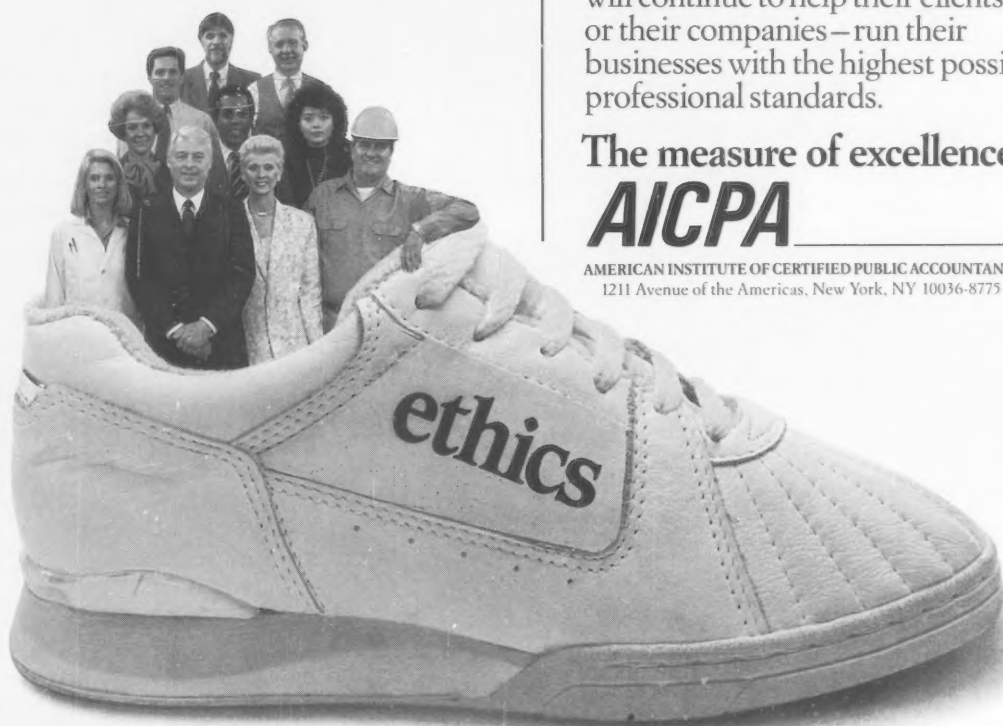
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# AT ISSUE

## Letters to the editor: How about a little down-home glasnost?

by RALPH NADER  
and STEVEN GOLD

Ever since portions of the Federalist Papers were published as letters to the editors of post-revolutionary era newspapers and gazettes, letters columns have functioned as transcripts of the town square, echoing with responses, corrections, amplifications, and interpretations from readers ranging from blacksmiths to cabinet secretaries. A reader's search for enlightenment is in-

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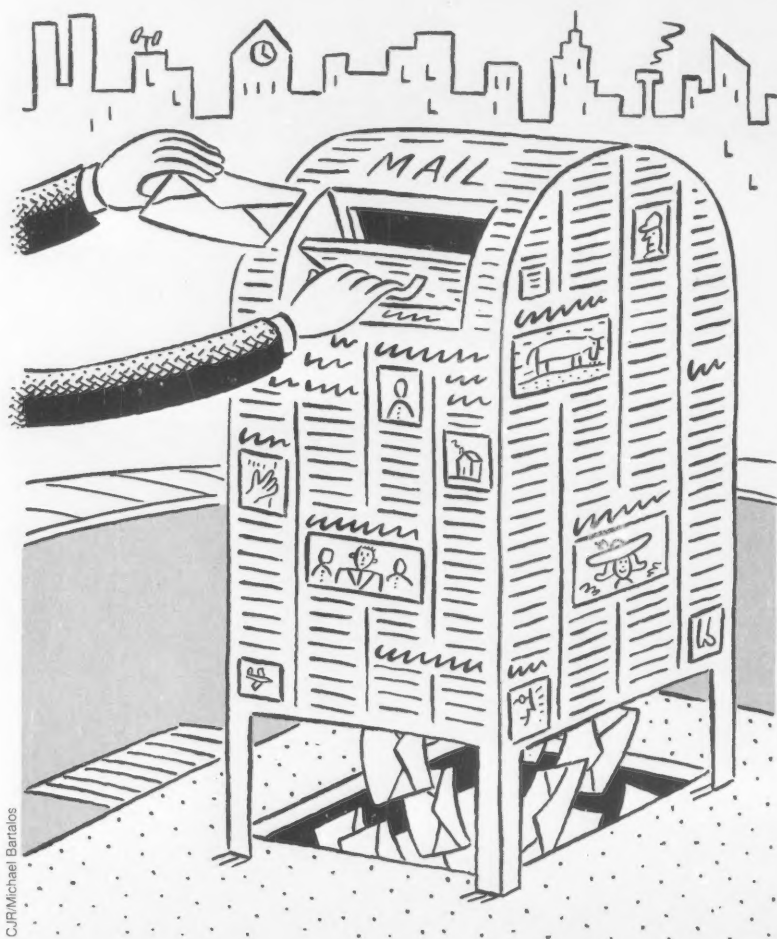
Today, however, editorial policies re-

garding letters-to-the-editor columns of American newspapers and magazines often seem designed to thwart that "full and free discussion" which Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas called "the first article of our faith." Many publications allocate too little space for the publication of too few letters. Many use self-serving criteria in deciding which letters to publish, and often edit substantively — not limiting themselves to grammatical changes and cuts in length — the letters that do make it into print.

A significant majority of readers seems to appreciate the indispensability of letters to the editor. Sixty percent of respondents to a 1985 Newspaper Advertising Bureau survey said they "usually read" letters to the editor. That is more than said they usually read editorials or op-ed page features. And, while letter writers are not as numerous as letter readers, the number of people who heed the impulse to talk back to newsmakers and their chroniclers has increased steadily since the Vietnam War era. The same 1985 NAB survey found that 13 percent of respondents had written a letter to the editor; in a 1961 survey, the figure was only 8 percent. Professor Steve Pasternack of New Mexico State University found that 84 percent of newspapers he surveyed reported increases in mail volume between 1970 and 1980. At *The New York Times*, mail volume has doubled since 1964.

Editors have affirmed this popular appreciation of the institution. In the words

*Ralph Nader is a Washington-based consumer advocate. Steven Gold is a free-lance writer living in Oakland, California. Research for this article was funded by Essential Information, a nonprofit organization that supports investigative journalism.*



# Something's fishy offshore

Turnabout, the adage has it, is fair play. But sometimes turnabout produces a delicious irony, if not a red face or two.

Take, as a case in point, the question of offshore drilling rigs. For decades now, their deployment has followed a ritualistic pattern, like the mating dance of the whooping crane.

The dance begins at some point after an oil company proposes to begin developing an oil lease it has paid good money for at a government auction. The company has prepared and submitted a detailed environmental impact statement and other assorted documents of impressive heft and bulk. That's usually when some group complains that drilling rigs are unsightly, messy, and will undoubtedly foul the seas and destroy the fish that dwell therein. There usually follows a period of legal skirmishing and, for the oil company, costly delay.

Now, according to a recent story in a major newspaper, some environmental groups are doing a turnabout. They are actually opposing the removal of rigs from their perches above played out oil fields. The reason: Over the length of their working lives, the rigs have been found to provide habitats for fish and other marine life. Removing them leaves these denizens homeless and hungry, and leaves fishermen with empty creels.

The article points out that oil companies are caught in a dilemma. International law requires some rigs to be removed after they cease production. In the U.S., all federal leases mandate removal within one year. Furthermore, the U.S. Navy warns that such

rigs can offer hiding places not only for finny friendlies, but also for less-amiable submarines. Besides, says the Navy, an abandoned rig is a navigational hazard.

On the other hand (dilemmas have at least two) officials in both the Interior and Commerce departments would like to see at least some of the rigs left in place. Failing that, they'd like the rigs transported to any of the artificial reefs that already dot the ocean precisely to encourage underwater critters to set up housekeeping. Economics also colors industry thinking; it's obviously cheaper to leave a rig in place than to demolish it, or even tow it to an underwater housing development.

As for the delicious irony, try this morsel from the same news story: The very rig responsible for the fabled Santa Barbara oil leak in 1969, thereby giving rise to the no-rig-is-a-good-rig movement, is today a source of delight for finicky palates.

The rig is still producing—oil and also mussels and other creatures that grow on its very legs. One entrepreneur has for some time been harvesting the mussels, along with others from nearby rigs, and selling them at premium price to the poshest places because they contain none of the grime found in their brethren from less desirable neighborhoods.

Seriously, folks, here are the questions we'd like to pose. If rigs are the bane of the environmental movement, by what logic can environmentalists mourn their demise? Or could it be that rigs—and offshore drilling—aren't so bad after all?

**Mobil**

of a 1934 *New York Times* editorial, letters to the editor "reflect a multitude of views and moods. They abound in curious information. They constitute a debating society that never adjourns, in which everything knowable is discovered. A sodality of voluntary correspondents, approving, wrathful, critical, philosophical, humorous, full of admonition, reproof, instruction, miscellaneous knowledge has succeeded the long-winded Publicolas and Catos of our long-suffering ancestors."

A 1981 survey of 667 working editors, reported in Leo Bogart's *The Press and the Public*, listed the number of letters published in a newspaper as the fourth most frequently mentioned criterion of quality, and in 1980 Professor Pasternack found that 59 percent of 212 editors believed that newspapers should devote more space to letters. As *New York Times* letters editor Robert Barzilay said when interviewed for this article, "It is really essential. Otherwise the public has no forum."

But most major publications are not

responding adequately to the growing popularity of the letters column with the public and are not heeding their own eloquent endorsements of this "essential" forum. Telephone interviews with letters editors at newspapers and magazines were revealing. *The New York Times* publishes an average of only about 4.5 percent of the 250 to 300 letters to the editor that it receives daily. *The Wall Street Journal* (which started a daily letters column only six years ago), the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *The Washington Post* all receive from 500 to 1,500 letters a week; none of these papers publishes more than 8 percent of the total. *The Boston Globe*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *The Miami Herald* receive 250 to 450 letters each week and publish 9 to 15 percent. *Time* and *Newsweek*, both of which heavily edit their reader submissions, receive approximately 1,000 letters a week each and publish fewer than 2 percent.

*The New Yorker* magazine is read by one of the most literate audiences of any popular magazine, yet it refuses to pub-

lish any of what would surely be fascinating reader correspondence. *Reader's Digest* also prints no letters. And *USA Today*, self-styled as "our" national news source, still lacks a daily letters column.

Limited space is not the only obstacle faced by letter readers and by writers seeking access. Not long ago, editors occasionally admitted to an ideological bias in their selection of letters to be printed. In 1977, the editor of the *Los Angeles Times* editorial pages told the paper's press critic, David Shaw, that when he came to the *Times* in 1969 "we tended not to run letters critical of the paper in any way. . . ." And in 1970 a *Chicago Tribune* editor was quoted in a *National Observer* story as saying, "We would prefer to print those [letters] that are more in accord with our editorial policy."

Today, editors avoid such blatant admissions and publications will print critical letters to the editor. But suspicion lingers about discriminatory or protec-

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tive selection policies. Author David Halberstam calls the letters that appear in *The New York Times* "oddly bloodless and sanitized." Ben Bagdikian, outgoing dean of the Graduate School of Journalism of the University of California at Berkeley, says that letters to any paper from people on the political left "certainly, in my impressionistic experience, have more trouble getting in than right-wing letters." Some right-wingers see it the other way around. Over the last two years *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The Washington Post* have used precious open space to answer charges from letter writers complaining of bias against letters supporting Ronald Reagan and Oliver North.

*New York Times* letters editor Barzilai, responding to a question about bias in the selection of letters for publication in the *Times*, says that critics "make a big deal out of it, but there is no deal at all. . . . There is only one person who can manipulate it [letters selection] at this time and that's me. And I am deadily neutral." Yet there are indications (see

sidebar) that *The New York Times* is reluctant to publish letters taking it to task for not reporting or for under-reporting an event or story, unlike *The Washington Post*, which often publishes such criticism.

To improve the service to readers offered by the letters column, we propose that the press take the following steps:

- **Increase the space allocated for letters.** At large papers, a minimum of one page for letters each day, with comparable increases at newsmagazines, would be a good-faith effort at beginning to practice what editors preach about reader access. When this idea was proposed to one editor, he said hyperbolically, "A paper can't just give pages away. It cannot survive." However, deciding to publish more than 3, 6, or 10 percent of the letters a newspaper receives from articulate readers and making the only widely circulated public forum more vital and accessible is not "just giving pages away." Who is a newspaper for, anyway? Some large newspapers man-

age to run a full page of letters once a week. *The Union Leader* in Manchester, New Hampshire, tops them all by printing almost all of the 6,000 letters it receives yearly, sometimes running four pages of letters in one day. As for the financial "survivability" argument, in 1987 average operating profits at publicly owned newspapers were 20 percent, according to Morton Newspaper Research, Inc.

- **Establish and consistently honor a right of reply for people or organizations criticized by name in news reports or editorials.** In 1974 the Supreme Court struck down a Florida right-of-reply statute on First Amendment grounds after a candidate for the Florida state legislature used the law to sue *The Miami Herald* for refusing to print his response to the *Herald's* repeated editorial attacks on him. Speaking for many press critics, Ben Bagdikian wrote: "Few of us want judges making news decisions, but the fact is *The Miami Herald* was wrong to have refused to give him space for a



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response. The paper had the law on its side, but not basic fairness."

● **Exercise extreme care when editing letters selected for publication.** Former *Des Moines Register* letters editor Bill Leonard says he tended to "chop the hell out of" letters selected for publication. Leonard and his counterparts swear that they direct their axes only at problems with "libel, taste, length, and grammar," without distorting substance. But while letter writers should avoid verbosity to increase their chances of publication, letters in *USA Today*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and other publications are often so abbreviated as to be trivial. We suggested to one letters editor that he use ellipses to denote where he made cuts in readers' letters. He said he avoids ellipses because their presence would "lead up to the question, 'What did you take out and why?'" This is, however, a good question for readers to ask. Editors of letters columns should not be too protective of the sensitivities of the paper's own writers. For example, a *New York Times* letters editor once ob-

jected to a reader calling an editorial "irresponsible" and excised the word.

● **Use editor's notes to resolve factual disputes raised in letters.** According to former editorial page editor Gilbert Cranberg, too often when a publication prints a letter to the editor that attempts to make a factual correction (as opposed to expressing a different opinion), the letter appears without an editor's note acknowledging or disputing the alleged error. When a note does appear, it is sometimes a terse proclamation that the paper "stands by its story," offering no supporting evidence. In such disputes over facts in the letters column, former National News Council associate director Richard Cunningham has written, "The reader has an interest in getting

enough information to decide who is right. The newspaper has an interest in explaining its position or in defending itself against an outright lie. None of these interests is properly served by the newspaper-stands-by-its-story rebuttal. This manifests a newspaper's refusal to engage in responsible rebuttal."

● **Promote and embellish the letters column.** Publications, with few exceptions, treat letters uncreatively. Here are some suggested improvements: use accompanying graphics and appealing layout techniques; eliminate rigid time limits between a story's appearance and the arrival of a letter in response to the story, after which the letter is summarily refused publication; lift the ban in effect at some papers against letters from out-

## Unfit to print?

Precise proof of bias in the selection of letters is impossible to obtain without seeing all the letters that come in to a publication and then asking the letters editor how he or she decides which ones go into the letters column and which go into the trash. We know of only one major newspaper, *The Des Moines Register*, that has ever allowed such access to a researcher — and, unfortunately, he did not focus on the question of bias. The following story, however, is noteworthy.

*The New York Times* received at least three letters to the editor from critics of a July 19, 1985, front-page article by *Times* Asia reporter Barbara Crossette about the island of East Timor, which was brutally invaded in 1975 and annexed the following year by the U.S.-supported government of Indonesia. One letter was published and two were provided to us by a source.

The article seemed to side with the Indonesians, who had been accused by the United Nations and Amnesty International of causing the deaths, by massacre and starvation, of up to one-third of the Timorese population. Crossette, whose visit to the normally sealed-off island was arranged by the Indonesian military, reported that the embattled countryside was now "largely peaceful" and that the lives of "most Timorese"

had "begun to improve materially." She also recounted the official denials of charges against Indonesia's conduct in East Timor, especially those leveled by Amnesty International in a report issued only two weeks before her arrival on the island, but failed to include comments from the authors of those charges.

On August 24, 1985, the one published letter, by Jane McWilliams of Gaston, Oregon, appeared in the *Times*'s letters column under the heading "Grains of Salt for Indonesia's View of East Timor." As the headline suggests, the letter was more critical of the Indonesians than it was of the *Times*, accusing the government of effectively using Crossette's special visit to "sandbag" the Amnesty International report, which McWilliams went on to defend.

By contrast, the first of the unpublished letters could have been called "Grains of Salt for *The New York Times*'s View of East Timor." Had readers been allowed to see this more critical letter by Cornell University professor Benedict R. Anderson, a leading U.S. expert on East Timor, they might have concluded that the *Times* had been an accomplice in the carrying out of an Indonesian deception. Anderson noted a number of Crossette's omissions, including the absence of any mention of the "grim contents" of the maligned

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side the state or the paper's circulation area; and allow responsible replies to letters from reporters and writers in order to create immediate dialogue (as a Philadelphia journalist wrote in a letter to the editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, "I can't believe that readers are really mollified by being given the right to shout into an unanswering void"). Although *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, and *The Nation* magazine excel in some of these areas, too many publications lag behind.

It is odd that major newspapers and magazines, which routinely report and comment on political apathy in America, do not promote civic participation through an amplified and more imaginative letters column. ■

Amnesty report, and her failure to report what a major guerrilla group had to say about conditions on the island. He concluded that the article was "depressingly misleading and misinformed." Interestingly, Anderson's letter was sent one full week earlier than McWilliams's, and was 20 percent shorter — two favorable considerations for publication, in addition to Anderson's expertise, which were apparently ignored.

The second rejected letter, from John G. Healey, executive director of Amnesty International-U.S.A., was also more critical of the *Times* than was the McWilliams letter. Healey defended the accuracy of the Amnesty report and claimed that "the *New York Times* article fosters the misperception that the human rights situation in East Timor is no longer serious." He noted Crossette's mention of the problem of livestock depletion on East Timor, but expressed disappointment at the *Times*'s inability "to confirm or deny the equally dramatic and tragic depletion of East Timor's civilian population."

When asked why he selected the McWilliams letter, *Times* letters editor Robert Barzilay said he had "no comment whatsoever," adding only that the letter he chose was probably better than the others.

R.N. and S.G.

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# BOOKS

## The pussycat problem

**On Bended Knee: The Press and the Reagan Presidency**

by Mark Hertsgaard

Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 448 pp. \$22.50

by FRED BARNES

This is a tirade against the mainstream press that reinforces a myth. Mark Hertsgaard, a free-lance journalist, argues that Sam Donaldson of ABC News and nearly every other reporter went soft in covering Ronald Reagan. Clever presidential aides such as Michael Deaver and David Gergen sought to turn the press into a mouthpiece for the administration, he says, and they largely succeeded. Not only that, but reporters went along with Reagan quite willingly. They tamed themselves, Hertsgaard insists.

This is silly. The press has been nicer to Reagan than it was to Jimmy Carter, but only marginally. The real reason Reagan has come off better is that he's been a more successful president and a more skillful politician than Carter was. White House reporters, Donaldson especially, have been tireless in pointing out Reagan's personal flaws and the shortcomings of his policies. Over and over, they've challenged the fairness of

Reagan's economic program, played up the budget deficit, raised doubts about Star Wars, recounted the president's many gaffes, caught him telling untruths, questioned his brainpower, and routed him at nationally televised press conferences with tough but fair questions. I could go on.

To me, the amazing thing is that so many reporters believe the soft-on-Reagan myth. They've fallen for a false syllogism. It goes like this. Reagan is reasonably popular and was reelected in a landslide. The job of the press is to make sure that presidents are unpopular and aren't reelected. Thus, the press has fallen down on the job. Hertsgaard adds a left-wing twist. Reporters haven't merely been pussycats in covering Reagan, they've often been conservative pussycats. He thinks the mainstream press (the TV networks, major newspapers, newsmagazines, and wire services) should cover Reagan the way *The Village Voice*, *The Nation*, and *Mother Jones* do. In other words, from a hard-left perspective. That they don't infuriates him.

Hertsgaard doesn't shy away from sweeping accusations. "As much through voluntary self-censorship as through government manipulation," he writes, "the press during the Reagan years abdicated its responsibility to re-

port fully and accurately to the American people what their government was really doing." It endorsed Reagan's policy on arms control and gave short shrift to the nuclear freeze movement. Worse, reporters abetted the president in whipping up the worst "anticommunist hysteria" in decades. On the economy, the press "let him off easy." When Reagan sent troops to Grenada in 1983, the press played it as his "finest hour."

But the worst came in 1984, Hertsgaard suggests, when the press tilted sharply against Walter Mondale. "When the economy kept expanding in 1984, the press saw little reason to resist Michael Deaver's attempt to portray Reagan's reelection as inevitable," he writes. "Campaign coverage obligingly conveyed the White House version of reality. While Walter Mondale was ridiculed as a wimp beholden to special interests, Ronald Reagan was saluted as a great patriot who made Americans proud of their country again. Thus did news organizations in the world's greatest democracy fulfill their self-proclaimed ideal of objective journalism in the fateful year of 1984."

For the life of me, I can't figure out where people get crazy ideas like these. Hertsgaard certainly can't substantiate his claims. I mean, what anticommunist hysteria is he talking about? Reagan would have loved to whip some up. But he couldn't, and the best evidence of this is the striking unpopularity of his policy of aiding the Nicaraguan contras. On nuclear arms, the press treated Reagan as the chief impediment to an arms control agreement with the Soviets. He was blamed for causing the Soviets to stalk out of negotiations. Reagan argued that the Soviets would come around, but reporters were skeptical (Reagan was right, it turns out). Nor did reporters characterize Mondale as a wimp or, as Hertsgaard indicates, think he was one. If he had spent time on the Mondale bus, Hertsgaard would have known that reporters liked Mondale but thought him a New Deal liberal out of step with the times and lacking in TV presence. Oh, yes, Hertsgaard also says Mondale's call for a tax hike reflected the "corporate influence" on his cam-



C.J. Niculae Asciu

*Fred Barnes is a senior editor of The New Republic.*



# We're biased.

## **We don't think equal opportunities should be tossed away.**

The struggle for equal opportunities at the workplace has been a hard fight. But there has been progress in government employment.

Now hard earned equality is being contracted away. As government turns to "contracting out," minorities are increasingly finding themselves jobless. In one city department in Houston, 17 of 18 employees fired because of privatization were Black. Over the last two and half years a variety of Houston public jobs have been turned over to private companies. Some 125 workers have lost their jobs as private companies cut employees. At least 80% were Hispanic or Black.

Los Angeles County

officials have found that after several services were contracted out, 90% of those laid off were Black, Hispanic or Asians.

Across the country minority and women workers who first found employment equality with government are losing their jobs and benefits because of contracting out.

Proponents of contracting out are always saying that privatization costs less and provides better services to the public.

But the truth is contracting out usually ends up costing more, not less.

After all, private companies are in the business of making a profit and don't have to answer to taxpayers.


Going private frequently means lower quality service as companies cut corners to make money. They hire more inexperienced, often

less motivated employees.

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So, what many officials are finding out is that while contracting out may look good on paper, it doesn't work in practice.

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paign. What corporate influence? He doesn't say.

Hertsgaard strains mightily to make the point that the corporate owners of TV networks and newspapers put the kibosh on critical stories about Reagan. Their motive: keep Reagan in office because his economic policies were a financial bonanza for them. The trouble is, Hertsgaard has little evidence to prove the point. He quotes "one very senior network journalist" as saying that, while not censoring critical material on Reagan, network officials "did often say 'Enough already, you've already made that point.'" Hertsgaard propounds a theory about "unwritten rules" laid down by corporate bosses. "It was true that superiors rarely interfered overtly in the news gathering and reporting process," he writes. "Nor did they often tell journalists what to say, at least not directly. The system of ideological control usually worked more subtly than that. In particular, it told journalists (again, generally implicitly) not so much what to say as what *not* to say. Like the most important rules in any bureaucracy, the news business commandments were not written down anywhere, or even acknowledged to exist by most members of the community. Nor could they be, if collective belief in the ideal of total journalistic freedom were to be preserved. Rather, journalists learned the unwritten rules as they went about their daily routine and pursued their career path." Well, all that is too subtle for me. I think he's talking about something that doesn't exist.

In truth, Hertsgaard's argument is not really with the press, but with Reagan. He's a flaming opponent of all Reagan's policies. And since the press takes a less ideological and partisan approach to Reagan, it's part of the problem. Reaganomics, he says, is "one of the greatest government-engineered transfers of wealth in modern U.S. history." Any reduction in taxes for the well-off is "subsidizing the few." He writes that there are "millions" of hungry and homeless people wandering America's streets. Reagan's quip about bombing the Soviet Union in five minutes is, to Hertsgaard, a "supposed joke." He dismisses the "zero option," which be-

came the basis for the treaty eliminating medium-range nuclear missiles, as a "propaganda exercise." Reagan's START proposal was a "transparently one-sided sham." And so on.

At times, Hertsgaard's ideology gets the better of him, and he gets things wrong. He says Reaganomics produced a "temporary" recovery. What we've had, of course, is the longest peacetime expansion in American history. He says the press didn't scream loudly enough when barred from covering the Grenada invasion because "it was considered bad form for journalists to complain about how difficult it was to report a news story." Who's he kidding? Reporters are incessantly complaining about the conditions under which they cover stories. When Reagan visited the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea, "the evening news shows, newspapers, and news weeklies across the country were filled with inspiring photos of the Leader of the Free World, dressed in a flak jacket, staring down the communists through field glasses," according to Hertsgaard. True enough. But every report on this that I saw or read stressed that the Reagan appearance was shameless image-building (which it was).

One more thing. Hertsgaard says that "most of the more than 100 journalists and news executives interviewed for this book rejected the idea that Ronald Reagan had gotten a free ride from U.S. news organizations." But he is hardly alone in thinking the press played into Reagan's hands. William Greider of *Rolling Stone* says White House reporters have developed an "ingrown quality of deference." Gergen and Deaver suggest the deference was even greater toward Reagan because the press felt guilty about having trashed Carter. Juan Williams of *The Washington Post* says that the White House policy of denying access to critical reporters worked: "Instead of the press . . . pushing for more press conferences, more access of all kinds," Williams observes, reporters "competed with one another to get that one interview or that one scoop." Richard Cohen, the former CBS News producer, says Reagan "got away with

murder" in 1984: "We played into his hands by taking his pictures exactly as they laid them out." Ben Bradlee, executive editor of *The Washington Post*, says reporters "didn't use the same standards" on Reagan that they used on Carter and on Nixon, partly because of "the unconscious feeling we had. . . that we were dealing with someone this time who really, really disapproved of us, disliked us, distrusted us, and that we ought not give him any opportunities to see he was right."

I'll give Hertsgaard credit for being right about White House intentions. Deaver and friends sought to make reporters wholly owned subsidiaries of the White House press operation. It didn't work. They put out a "line of the day." Reporters scoffed. They controlled access to Reagan. Reporters found other sources who revealed, often with juicy, unflattering details, what Reagan was up to. On bended knee, they weren't.

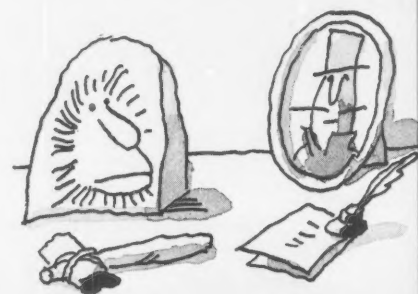
## Primal urge

**A History of News:  
From the Drum to the Satellite**

by Mitchell Stephens  
Viking. 393 pp. \$24.95

by PIERS BRENDON

This book's main claim is that there is nothing new about news. The urge to bear and to hear the latest tidings is rooted in human nature. The electronic media have not suddenly turned us into what Helen Thomas called "news junkies." Newspapers did not invent news (though journalists, notably those in Rupert Murdoch's pay, have been known to invent news items). Nor did the yel-



low press invent sensationalism, the ingredients of which — rape, murder, fire, earthquake — have a perennial appeal. Techniques of communication change but the passion for novelty stays the same. News is old hat.

Much of this is unexceptionable and some of it is a blinding glimpse of the obvious, but Stephens, a professor of journalism at New York University, doggedly undertakes to prove it all beyond a scholarly peradventure. The result is disappointing. His book is labored and derivative. It is a piece of research feeding off other pieces of research, an exercise in academic cannibalism. The style is wooden, relieved only now and then by a quotation — Norman Mailer accusing journalists of “munching nuances like peanuts,” Clive James suggesting that to be called “the greatest tabloid journalist of all time” is like being called “the greatest salesman of sticky sweets in the history of dentistry.”

Apparently hoping to invest the book with this kind of flair, somebody has dreamed up its racy new subtitle. The original one was “From Oral Culture to the Information Age,” which more accurately describes its contents. Stephens says little, if anything, about drums but does say a great deal about the verbal transmission of news before the arrival of script and print. He tells us, for example, that the Siwan women of north Africa wail “Yaiiii-yai-yai-yai-yai-yai-yai-yaiiii!” from the rooftops in order to broadcast the news of a death in the tribe. Fascinating though such information is, it raises at least two ques-

*Piers Brendon, author of The Life and Death of the Press Barons, lives in Cambridge, England.*

tions. First, has Stephens understood the anthropological texts he has so assiduously studied? On the face of it the cry of the Siwan women would seem to be an expression of grief rather than an item of news.

Secondly, how far can news be regarded as such when it is restricted to a narrow circle? Stephens defines news as “new information about a subject of some public interest that is shared with some portion of the public.” Yet he includes in his discussion not only the local gossip of small, preliterate societies but also Socrates’ wish to hear about the current state of philosophy (“a form of specialized news”), the “news” that the Vikings had discovered America (which failed to reach Christopher Columbus), and the “Fugger News-Letters” — though he acknowledges that the commercial information they contained was “private news. . . something of an oxymoron.” Yes, indeed. News, as we understand it, depends on some form of mass means of dissemination; it is hardly an accident that the word dates from the time of Gutenberg. “Tidings,” the Old English term, might more aptly describe much of the oral communication about which Stephens writes.

Still, he does give a solid account of the advance of public intelligence, from Rome’s city gazette (handwritten on papyrus by slaves) to the twenty-four-hour all-news channels of today. He observes, too, that almost every attempt to transmit information has been accompanied by efforts to suppress, censor, or otherwise manipulate it. From the pope in Rome to the emperor in Peking, from the sultan of Turkey to the king of France, rulers invariably tried to control the news. During some of the worst pe-



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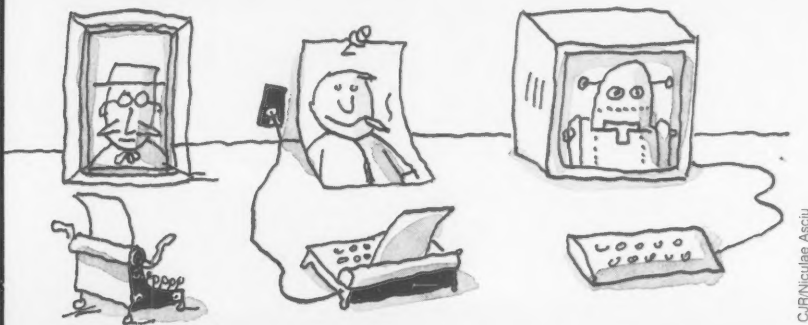
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riods of the Wars of the Roses, English monarchs stationed guards on the roads out of Calais to prevent news of their troubles reaching other states — about the only trick Mrs. Thatcher missed during the *Spycatcher* affair.

Stephens is rather fastidious in his treatment of sensationalism, as though crime, violence, sex, prodigies, catastrophes, and men who bite dogs are out of place in his monograph. However, he does include one or two piquant reports, such as that of the seventeenth-century fishmonger who, before murdering his children, took into his house "a Wench, whose name was Jane Blundell, who in a short time was better acquainted with her Master's bed than honesty required." He cites the immortal exchange between Charles Dana and Joseph Pulitzer:

"I have never published a falsehood."

"That's another lie."

And he reminds us that Murdoch's London *Sun* (16 NUDE WITCHES SEIZED) can sometimes eclipse even the *National En-*

*quirer* (EXPERT CLAIMS CABBAGE PATCH DOLLS CAN BE POSSESSED BY THE DEVIL).

Stephens is evidently happier charting the growth of journalistic integrity as it has occurred over recent years. He notes the increasing respect for ideals of accuracy and objectivity. He quotes James Parton's aphorism, "An editorial is a man speaking to men, but the news is Providence speaking to men" (though not C. P. Scott's pithier "Comment is free but facts are sacred"). He recognizes that a surfeit of news is one of today's main problems and that the investigative reporter must do battle with the public relations machine. He wonders pertinently whether, in learning to fetch and dig, newshounds are losing their ability to bite.

Curiously, though, the closer Stephens gets to the present the narrower his focus becomes. What starts as a

global history ends as a commentary on the current American scene. This distorts his whole picture. Stephens suggests, for instance, that journalists and publishers now have a common set of interests and values and that the strictures of William Cobbett, the radical nineteenth-century British journalist, are outdated: "The reporter comes, unless he be a supple knave, and brings his true report. The vile hunks of the proprietor, then garbles, guts, swells out, cuts short, or otherwise manages the report according to his interest." Stephens's assessment may be correct as far as the United States is concerned. Elsewhere — in Britain, say — Cobbett's comments remain thoroughly apposite. Still, at least this means that Mitchell Stephens has got his main title right. What he has written is very much *A History*, not *The History*, of *News*.

## Moments of truth?

### Presidential Debates: Their Power, Problems, and Promise

by Kathleen Hall Jamieson and David S. Birdsall  
Oxford University Press. 272 pp.  
\$19.95

by J. L. SWERDLOW

Most people are unlikely to read a book about debates. Life is too busy, and debates seem overdone, over-reported, and not over soon enough.

But debates are too important to ignore. New communications technologies, new economics of news dissemination, and new modes of campaigning have produced a new age of debates; 1988 has had more debates than the previous 200 years combined. Thus, *Presidential Debates: Their Power, Problems, and Promise* should not be ignored. If not read cover to cover, it does deserve a serious skim.

*Presidential Debates* is well researched and well written, and full of

interesting ideas. The authors, both academics, avoid the jargon and convoluted sentence structure that make so much scholarly writing inaccessible. The first half provides a definitive academic history of campaign debates in America. In that regard, the book's title is somewhat misleading because its historic scope by necessity extends to debate at all political levels.

Much of this history can help us understand today's problems. Complaints that press coverage consists of too much on the horse race and too little on substance, for example, date back to the days when Davy Crockett was rewarding debate audiences with whiskey. This should provide some comfort to journalists who now find themselves accused of a supposedly new sin. History also helps dispel misleading myths — for example, Lincoln and Douglas did not debate in the sense that we use the word today; they gave long, back-to-back speeches, followed by long rebuttals.

Jamieson and Birdsall demonstrate that technology — and not tradition — gives shape to modern debates. In 1988, two or three debates a week among presidential contenders were not uncommon. Why now? Why not during the nineteenth century or during the age of radio? The answer is complex, but as Jamieson

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*J. L. Swerdlow is a fellow at The Annenberg Washington Program in Communications Policy Studies of Northwestern University. He is editor of Presidential Debates: 1988 and Beyond, and Media Technology and the Voter: A Source Book.*



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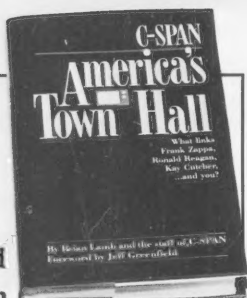
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**BOOKS**

and Birdsell make clear, understanding modern debates must begin with understanding television technology.

In this connection, Jamieson and Birdsell make two points that are particularly useful in helping us determine what to expect from campaign debates. First, today's debates, essentially in the form of candidates answering questions from the press, have evolved in part from the presidential press conference, which is itself largely a product of television. Second, modern debates are an extension of the relatively modern notion that an objective "truth" somehow exists if only journalists can find it or candidates can be forced to reveal it.

Readers not interested in the history can move right into the "problems" and "promise" chapters. Here can be found suggestions on how to improve debates — and, in particular, press involvement in debates.

Jamieson and Birdsell want to eliminate the panel of press questioners. Their specific proposal is to have a variety of formats, including the "conversational" (candidates seated around a table with a moderator) and "a form of direct confrontation" in which candidates make relatively long (eight-minute) statements and then engage in give-and-take exchanges guided by a moderator.

That such reforms would improve debates is beyond dispute. One example: on February 23, 1984, Barbara Walters used the conversational mode to pursue Jesse Jackson and catch him in sophisticated evasions. Jamieson and Birdsell

quote at length from transcripts. Jackson squirms and the voter becomes better informed.

Such examples, however, also show why serious reform of debates is unlikely. Candidates control debate formats, and one of the ugly secrets about debates is that candidates *want* journalists asking questions because candidates know that such a format presents minimal danger to themselves. Change in the direction advocated by Jamieson and Birdsell can come only when voters — perhaps by turning off their television sets when the same old debates appear — force candidates to accept a format that leaves them more exposed.

*Presidential Debates* argues that journalists' questions during a debate and press coverage following a debate should focus on issues and not on non-substantive matters such as campaign strategy or personality conflicts. The authors also correctly note that candidates' statements in a debate often include distortions or misstatements of fact that reach a television audience significantly larger than the number of voters who read follow-up newspaper stories documenting candidate errors. The solution, they say, is for broadcasters to amass an army of researchers that will enable post-debate commentators immediately to pinpoint any deviation from the truth.

Jamieson and Birdsell's most practical suggestion is that each presidential debate be built around a narrow, stated proposition, such as "How should the United States protect itself from nuclear



attack?" They also want debate rules which permit candidates to use visual aids such as maps, graphs, and video clips. Such reforms would improve debates, but would not necessarily improve coverage of debates. That improvement can come only from within the journalism profession itself.

In the meantime, 1988 promises to bring more of the same. Look for a lot of stories on who should sponsor debates. (Jamieson and Birdsell come out in favor of sponsorship by the major political parties.) But as their book points out, sponsorship is one of the least important issues. The real question is, How can a romantic and exciting concept — two candidates standing side by side in front of virtually every voter — be made to better serve democracy?

## Reinventing the form: a Pole apart

### The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat

by Ryszard Kapuscinski  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983. 180 pp. \$12.95; paperback Vintage, \$5.95

### Shah of Shahs

by Ryszard Kapuscinski  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985. 192 pp. \$12.95

### Another Day of Life

by Ryszard Kapuscinski  
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987. 136 pp. \$14.95; paperback Penguin, \$6.95  
(All books translated by William R. Brand and Katarzyna Mroczkowska-Brand.)

by HELEN BENEDICT

Ryszard Kapuscinski is a short, balding, Pole who, during almost thirty years as a reporter for the Polish Press Agency, witnessed twenty-seven revolutions, specialized in being the first and last journalist at the scene of every third-world war he could find, and bleeped out 100-word dispatches over the telex about these events almost every day.

*Helen Benedict is an assistant professor at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism. Her novel, A World Like This, will be published next year.*

Then, about fourteen years ago, he was sent to cover yet another revolution — the overthrow of Haile Selassie, emperor of Ethiopia.

"I was asked to write a series of background reports," he told his audience during an appearance at the PEN American Center last April. "I started to write in the usual way: you come to the airport, there are tan's on the road. you go through checking several times, you find a hotel, there is no water, nothing to eat. With certain experience you can sit down and write twenty such reports within one day, just changing the names of the town. Journalism is a necessary but very poor way of expression. So when I came back I started to write automatically this way, and I understood that I couldn't go on with this. Something was finished in my writing. I would just hate myself."

Kapuscinski went on to say that he came to loathe the 100-word dispatches and newsmagazine articles he was required to write. He wanted to avoid what he called the "disinformation" created by the necessary omission of the "reality of other cultures, of other worlds, of other situations, other peoples" in those hurried bulletins. So he hid himself away, avoiding urgent cables and telegrams from his employers, and tried to find a new way, a new "form," as he put it, by which to translate Ethiopia to the rest of the world. He chose a series of testimonies by Selassie's former courtiers, one of which opens *The Emperor*:

It was a small dog, a Japanese breed. His name was Lulu. He was allowed to sleep in the Emperor's great bed. During various ceremonies, he would run away from the Emperor's lap and pee on dignitaries' shoes. The august gentlemen were not allowed to flinch or make the slightest gesture when they felt their feet getting wet. I had to walk among the dignitaries and wipe the urine from their shoes with a satin cloth. This was my job for ten years.

Until 1983, Kapuscinski's work was unknown in America, and even though he has published eleven books of journalism and poetry in Poland, only the three listed above are available in English. *The Emperor* was the first to be translated, and is part of a trilogy on

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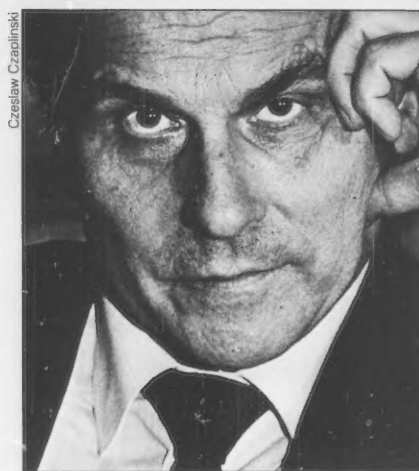
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## BOOKS

dictators, the other two being *Shah of Shahs*, about the last shah of Iran, and a book on Idi Amin which Kapuscinski is working on now. The most recent book, *Another Day of Life*, is about the civil war in Angola. Only in the last year or so, however, with a teaching position at Temple University, an interview in *Granta* magazine, and his appearance at PEN, has Kapuscinski been gaining the recognition he deserves in this country as a new New Journalist.

Finding a new form is essential to Kapuscinski, who says that he won't finish a book if he thinks it isn't original. Thus, each of his books is different. In *The Emperor*, he intersperses the verbatim testimonies of the courtiers with brief, carefully chosen descriptions that expose the constant fear under which the Ethiopians were living. As the emperor felt his power slipping, for instance, he had his courtiers spy on each other, waiting for the chance to turn in their colleagues and see them condemned to death. Kapuscinski shows them beginning literally to stoop and shrink under the pressure. People start to talk in whispers, to distrust their neighbors, to stop each other on the street in order to conduct impulsive, frantic searches of one another's bodies. "Anyone can search us, because we don't know who has the right and who hasn't. . . . Guys in rags with sticks, who don't say anything, but only stop us and hold out their arms, which is the signal to do the same: get ready to be searched." Brothers murder brothers, sons betray fathers. The originality of this book lies in Kapuscinski's three-fold ability to capture the voices of the courtiers, to choose the right anecdotes to illustrate how oppression corrupts the mind, body, and even the soul, and to relay all this in simple, poetic imagery.

*Shah of Shahs* is divided into three parts: the first, mood; the second, descriptions of photographs; the third, reflections on the "sense and nonsense" of revolution. It is the middle part, which was excerpted by *The New Yorker* in 1985, that is the most innovative. In it, Kapuscinski brings photographs of the shah and his predecessors to life by using his research to imagine what the people are saying, thinking, and feeling in and beyond each picture — or, as he puts it,



Ryszard Kapuscinski

making the pictures move and act. The three parts add up to a scrapbook of terror, a portrait of what a procession of despots — the shahs and Khomeini — can do to a land and its people. On one page, for example, Kapuscinski lists over thirty words the Iranians were afraid to speak under the shah lest the words be interpreted as revolutionary and the speaker be whisked off to prison — everyday words such as "darkness," "cage," and "madness."

The most recent book, *Another Day of Life*, is simpler in form. It is a first-person account of the start of Angola's civil war in 1975 and of the way Kapuscinski was caught up in it like a paper bag in a windstorm. The war broke out after Portugal gave Angola its independence and various Angolan parties began battling for power. Rather than a story about dictatorship, this book is about a particular kind of poor, understaffed, underplanned war, in which the soldiers are children and the sides are torn into so many factions that no one can even keep track of who is who: a typical third-world war.

The book opens with a description of the city of Luanda gradually emptying out. First it becomes a "wooden city" as the Portuguese frantically pack their belongings until every street is filled with wooden crates. Then the ships come to take the crates, and the city floats away. As usual, Kapuscinski stays



behind, watching the place slowly die. The restaurants and cafes close down, the merchants leave, the fire department leaves, the garbagemen leave, the police leave, the water is cut off. "From time to time some car would drive through the empty streets, running the red lights that kept functioning automatically, God knows for whom." Finally, only the dogs are left, expensive breeds mingling with mutts, copulating on the city lawns in a massive orgy of dog-freedom. Then, overnight, even the dogs disappear. "The city fell into rigor mortis. So I decided to go to the front."

The narrative quickly shifts pace as Kapuscinski is catapulted from one terrifying situation to the next. "At the front staff headquarters. . . I was greeted by a young white Angolan, a political commissar. His name was Nelson. He greeted me with joy, as if I were a guest he had been expecting all along — and sent me at once to a near-certain death." Kapuscinski is put into a truck, sent hurtling through the glaring bush, and is casually told that no car has yet survived this journey without being ambushed. His companions appear, and win our sympathy, on one page, only to die on the next. But this book, too, breaks the conventional journalistic mold, not in its form but because, rather than being a political account of war — why it happened, the motives behind it, which side believed what — it is an account of the minute, human details of living this kind of war. As a result, the book reads like a fever dream, as riddled with terror as a machine-gunned shack.

**B**orn in 1932, Kapuscinski spent his childhood amidst the terrors of World War II and his university years under Stalinism — conditions that he says led to his fascination with "power, death, and extreme situations." Later, at the age of twenty-three, he wrote an investigative article for a student magazine which caused such an uproar that he had to go into hiding. He was caught, fired, and punished (although he won't say how), until, in a peculiar twist, the government investigated his allegations, confirmed them, and awarded him the Golden Cross of Merit. He went on to write a book of

stories about Poland, which became a best-seller. Shortly afterwards, in the wake of his new fame, he asked his editor to send him abroad. Ever since, he has been writing about the third world, and now he is in the odd position of being feted in an iron curtain country for writing about the horror of oppressive regimes. He achieved this paradox by mastering the skill of metaphor.

Kapuscinski's books work as metaphors, and perhaps this is their most original aspect, because he pays more attention to the human experience of terror than to particular histories or places. To him, the truth of a story is not told by dates and events (some of his books have no dates, no clear chronology of events, although all are factually accurate), but by people's reactions to them. As Kapuscinski says, he writes not of countries but of states of mind. He said at PEN that some readers recognize his metaphors even more personally: "People say to me, Ryszard, this is exactly what happened in my office."

Kapuscinski conveys his horror of authoritarianism through vivid images — his books read more like a series of verbal photographs than the comprehensive narratives of other writers. Thus, when he reports on a people under oppression, he tells us how they hold their hands, which verbs they use, and what they wear and eat. He shows us starving people waiting motionless for scraps outside a banquet of mythical proportions, then bursting into a frenzy of greed when the food arrives. He makes us feel the terror of passing armed men in dark goggles and of the sinister lull between gunshots. And he does this all by his poet's choice of detail: crisp, bizarre, telling.

Kapuscinski has called his fellow war correspondents "hardened, cynical men who have seen everything and lived through everything, and who are used to fighting a thousand obstacles that most people could never imagine, just to do their jobs." But he himself, despite half a lifetime in the bush, in war and terror and danger, is neither hardened nor cynical, but impassioned. The passion shows in the care and precision of his journalism. He has said that he sees his work not as a vocation, but a mission. His books prove it. ■

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# UNFINISHED BUSINESS

## Gergen reviews a bumpy ride

TO THE REVIEW

Your article on *U.S. News & World Report* ("Bumpy Ride at U.S. News," *CJR*, May/June) describes the magazine as "surprising, enterprising, and thoughtful." That comment is a welcome reflection on efforts during recent years to improve the quality of the magazine, efforts that are now beginning to pay off in higher circulation, advertising, and visibility. But several corrections need to be made.

In discussing our March 30, 1987, cover story, "The Ayatollah's Big Sting," author Michael Hoyt should have made it clear that this article resulted from careful investigatory work by a special *U.S. News* team. Among those who contributed to the reporting were Giora Shamis, a contributing editor to the magazine who was a chief foreign reporter for some fourteen years for *The Economist's Foreign Report*; Mel Elfin, who for many

years was a key figure at *Newsweek* and has recently joined *U.S. News*; and Steve Emerson, who has recently published a well-received book on U.S. counterintelligence. All of the material that was printed was checked through multiple sources and those details that we could not verify to our satisfaction were excised. Strikingly, much of the story has been confirmed by other subsequent reports, as we explained to Hoyt. Furthermore, Hoyt did not make clear that those intimately involved in the project stand squarely behind the story. Executive editor Michael Ruby and I were both explicit with Hoyt in stating our support of the story, but Hoyt chose to quote only Mort Zuckerman to that effect, leaving open by implication that others were not supportive. We reject that implication.

Hoyt also refers to unnecessary "turmoil" at the magazine. What he calls turmoil we call constructive change. Along with the change of leadership and culture from an employee-owned company to one owned by a single individual, we have undertaken the biggest overhaul of perhaps any mass circulation magazine in years. We have recruited a staff that is more than two-thirds new and, of course, there are some individuals from the former editorial staff who did not fit into our plans for the future and are now disgruntled. But to rely almost entirely upon their old gossip, as did Hoyt, hardly meets *CJR's* normally high standard of reporting.

Hoyt also portrays our chairman and editor-in-chief, Mort Zuckerman, as insufficiently patient with the time it takes to remake a magazine. That assertion is contradicted by his doubling of the editorial budget, by his own commitment of time and energy to the magazine, and by the parallel experience that he has had with *The Atlantic* magazine. Mort Zuckerman, like the rest of us, is obviously anxious to move forward as rapidly as we can. Hoyt gives too little credit to the vision and leadership that Zuckerman has brought to the enterprise.

Finally, Hoyt maligns the magazine by saying that its enormous circulation success has been done with mirrors and price cuts. In fact, after an initial price cut, the magazine has increased its basic subscription price twice since October 1985 by a total of 38 percent. In the first half of 1988, *U.S. News* circulation averaged 2,362,000, the highest

level ever and a level achieved despite the higher prices. *Time* and *Newsweek* claim they sell their magazines at a higher basic rate, but the ABC statements reveal that neither sells many subscriptions at these rates. In 1987 *Newsweek* sold only 10 percent of its subscriptions at the full rate; the rest were sold at discounts ranging up to 50 percent, well below the rate of this magazine. *U.S. News* in 1987 sold over 75 percent of its circulation at full rate.

DAVID R. GERGEN

Editor

*U.S. News & World Report*  
Washington, D.C.

Michael Hoyt replies: *My story does indeed make it clear that U.S. News sent Elfin and Emerson to work with Shamis on the "Big Sting" article, and that the magazine "spent a lot of time and effort trying to verify" the original file. Among the points that Gergen does not address are that one-third of the "special U.S. News team" — Steven Emerson — told a colleague that his investigation led him to the conclusion that the Big Sting story had been "fabricated," and that the editor in Washington who wrote the final draft declined a byline, partly because his skepticism about the reporting in it "never quite vanished," partly because he did not like relying on outsiders like Shamis, whose later work troubled a number of U.S. News journalists. I did not mean to imply that Gergen and Ruby did not back the Big Sting story.*

*I don't think I maligned the magazine by reporting that all three newsweeklies make charges and countercharges about each other's circulation figures. In fact, I wrote that, so far, the numbers tend to back up the claim that the new U.S. News is catching on with advertisers and readers. As for turmoil, one man's editorial chaos is another man's "constructive change," I suppose. But I did talk to dozens of former and current U.S. News employees before reaching the conclusion that the ride was pretty bumpy when owner/editor Zuckerman was still learning to fly.*

## A voter fraud story

TO THE REVIEW:

I found it interesting that you awarded a Laurel to WCBS-TV, New York, reporter Bar-

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# The Lower case

## Dad wants baby left on airliner

Boulder, Colo., *Daily Camera* 7/16/88

## Koop says nicotine addicts like heroin

Horsham, Pa., *Record* 5/17/88

## Two recruits satisfy OSU women's coach

Columbus, Ohio, *Dispatch* 6/10/88

## Ah, the glamour, the pigs

Attica, Ind., *Star Tribune* 6/3/88



## Use of basement must end in fall

Asbury Park, N.J., *Press* 7/1/88

## Dentist receives plaque

Carroll County (Md.) *Times* 7/14/88

## What teens think

They like Bush, but fear AIDS

*The Cincinnati Post* 7/12/88

## Prisoners Earn Trust, Freedom From Governor

*Albuquerque Journal* 5/31/88

**INDIANAPOLIS —**  
Parole Board advised clemency for Shirley Eisinger, 40, who killed husband in '72 with ant poison.  
Next: Gov. Orr.

*USA Today* 6/9/88

## Panama Curbs Puzzle Companies

*The New York Times* 4/12/88

## Police walking Market Street strip on regular basis

Wilmington, Del., *News Journal* 6/12/88

## CORRECTIONS

In an article run June 28 on Vermont College commencement speaker Peace Corps Director Lorete Miller Ruppe, it was reported that she was urging graduates to actively engage in "global riotism." Due to a computer error, this was a misquote. It should have read that Ruppe urged graduates to engage in "global patriotism."

*The Times-Argus* (Montpelier, Vt.) 7/5/88

## Last-minute substitute drowns leading students on coast trail

Victoria, B.C., *Times Colonist* 6/16/88

## Lawyer accused of lying to fly

*The Miami Herald* 7/6/88

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